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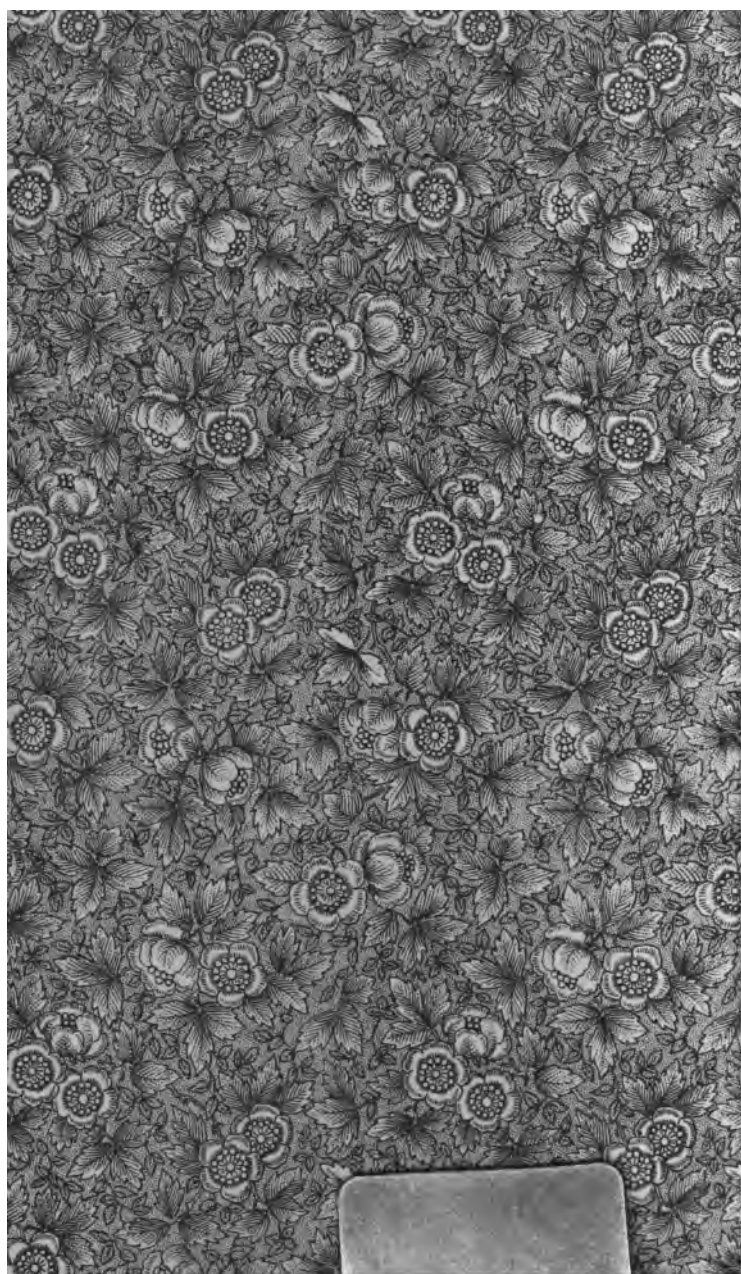
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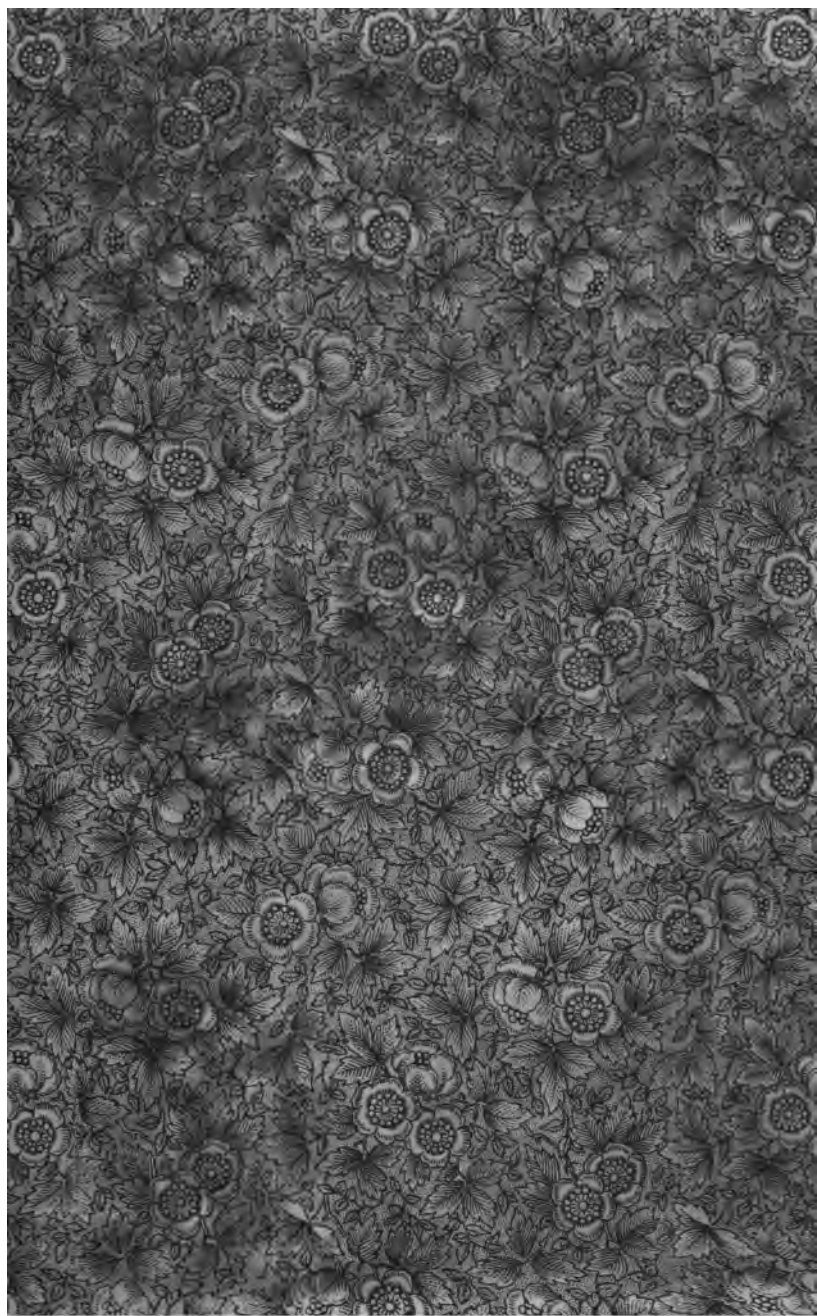
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FAIR FACES AND TRUE HEARTS









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FAIR FACES AND TRUE HEARTS.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“MARGARET MORTIMER’S SECOND HUSBAND.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON: F. V. WHITE & CO.,
31 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1882.

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FAIR FACES AND TRUE HEARTS.



CHAPTER I.

A FORTUNE WITH A WIFE.

IT would be impossible to describe the feelings which I experienced in reading this narrative, concerning myself as it did so much; and discovering to me the mystery of the Dalrymple murder, which I had vainly tried to solve. I now knew the cause of my uncle's singular sensitiveness about that disastrous event, of his dislike to hear the subject mentioned, and of his gloomy and

peculiar conduct during his sojourn at Dalrymple.

There was little wonder that conflicting emotions overpowered me—that my excitement, while my mind digested the horrible facts, constantly increased—that I laid aside the paper, not once, but many times, to walk about the room and give vent, by ejaculations, to my natural repugnance to the criminal; to the meanness of his nature; the pettiness of his character, encouraged as it had been by self-indulgence, till it became the very epitome of brutal selfishness.

There are murders committed in hot haste to revenge some real wrong—as for instance a murder with a victim such as this dastardly criminal himself, who had robbed his father, purloined a woman's virtue, and used his lawful wife and everybody who loved him for his own convenience and gratification, even though he had stopped short of that last bloody deed. I say there are murders

such as these which excite a sensation of pity for the offender. Not that such an act can ever be other than abhorrent to a sane judgment—it must always be terrible alike in its motive, its reality, its consequences. But there have been such cases, when one admitted that the earth was well rid of a villain, and that the murderer was unfortunate as well as culpable in accumulating the savage passions of his nature into one mighty hurricane, which spent its force in the total destruction of a fellow-creature.

Murder is terrible at all times ; but when such ignoble motives prompt it, such a pitiful attempt at self-exculpation is revealed, such a fatal tampering with the conscience that provoked repentance is acknowledged, we must stop short of pity for the criminal, from a human point of view, and wait till that higher part of our nature suggests a better judgment, from that heaven-born quality of mercy which can enfold the whole race of man,

with all its disfigurements of mind and heart.

It was a satisfaction to me to understand that the presence of my uncle at the murder was an accident. I comprehended the whole circumstance—at least I imagined that the memory of Nina had made him averse to a marriage with Miss Earl. But as Nina was, he supposed, dead, I thought he might have fulfilled his promise to the former lady without injuring Nina. I, even, could not excuse him, for he had deserted Miss Earl without formally breaking his engagement; he had entangled himself with Nina in the meantime, and, as she had died, the least he could do was to compensate Miss Earl for her tedious waiting by marrying her; and he would, at the same time, have thus fulfilled his late father's behest. I could imagine that compulsion in such a matter would be disagreeable, and that he might wish to satisfy himself whether Miss Earl really possessed the will. That there had

been some disagreement was evident, or Miss Earl would never have been so foolish as to reveal its existence.

However, it was well for me that I now knew positively, what I had previously only surmised, that my uncle had been an unwilling witness of the murder. Perhaps sometime he might explain how he came to be so. It was also satisfactory to discover the exact mode of the murderer's entrance to and exit from the house. From my childish description of the affair in the report, which I had carefully studied, I inferred that he had entered the room by the door, and that therefore Miss Earl, though awake at the time, was unaware of his presence.

This was now proved. At the inquest any little particulars given by a boy of my years would possess no signification for the jury—they would not attach the slightest importance to such minor details from my lips. Nevertheless, my observation had been very accurate.

I now knew that, on the night of Edward Ormonde's death, after the final struggle, his spirit had restlessly passed, in apparition fashion, through the windows and doors of those two rooms at Dalrymple, in which my childish dread and sense of horror had been so rudely awoken. The first act of the released spirit had thus been accomplished, to my own knowledge. Would it occur again? or, when the mystery was unravelled to the living world, would those actors in the past sleep easily in their graves?

I made up my mind that no such visitors should affright me more. I would studiously avoid the haunted wing of Dalrymple Hall.

I recalled the particulars of Edward Ormonde's death, as related by my friend Chance. I comprehended the horrors of the imagination which surrounded the dying man; and I found that the hour of his death corresponded with that in which I was aroused at Dalrymple by a ghostly visitor.

I was then sleeping in my grandfather's room, though I had not known this. Mrs Mayne had probably placed me there, as being the one most suitably furnished for a gentleman, in the west wing, little opining by doing so that my rest would be less sweet, my repose more uncertain there than elsewhere.

About the will itself I had little curiosity. My uncle had treated me as a son. I had grown to regard the tie between us in this light since his illness, though, before that, our relationship had seemed more that of brothers of unequal age. I was convinced that he had no desire to withhold from me any property to which I was justly entitled. The will itself was unjust; about the most cruel and mischievous device to coerce a man into matrimony that could be; the position of a man of property without means, and who has to run into debt in anticipation of his fortune is awkward. Yes, the will was flagrantly unjust; and if it had tempted

my uncle to defraud me in the days gone by, I would not blame him, even in my heart.

After Jane Earl's death the position was altered. He could not then marry her, and I believe that, in any court of law, they would have ruled that the will was worthless, though justice and legality are differing elements, as all the world knows. For the rest, he had treated me as a son, not, I felt assured, from any motive of restitution, but because he was drawn towards the little, lonely boy who had gone through such a terrible ordeal; and later, because he had found my companionship helpful and congenial.

The responsibility of being entrusted with such a terrible secret of crime weighed upon me. I did not know how much of this it might be safe to reveal to my uncle, on account of his shattered health. On the one hand, it might comfort him to know that all was made plain which had been crooked, and to talk freely of his own

share in the mystery might be a relief ; on the other hand, the excitement might be more hurtful than the beneficial results thus anticipated.

It was clearly my duty to betray part of the facts to Tom Chance, as Helen's husband ; but, most assuredly, I was not called upon to bring my uncle's name into the story. Then, again, I was anxious to clear the innocent of any lingering suspicion ; and, by publishing the true facts, disabuse the mind of those who secretly maligned my uncle, by imagining he could have been guilty of so gross a crime. To do this it would not be necessary to give more than a summary of this narrative, withholding such particulars as I thought were inconsequential to the object in view.

I was sorry to find myself mentioned by Edward Ormonde in such affectionate terms ; shocked to think that I had indeed been intimate with this man for many weeks, and surprised to hear that he

had conceived, through my readiness to conciliate and soothe him, on his bed of sickness — which willingness was the outcome of tender solicitude for Helen, that my own interest in him was great. I did not now wonder at my, then, unaccountable dislike to follow his remains to the grave. A natural instinct prompted me to revolt against this semblance of respect, to one whom I had yet to learn distinctly to abhor.

It was late in the night when I had ended my reading, and the reflections upon it which followed. I remember feeling so awed and impressed by the painful details, that it was a source of self-gratulation that I was the inmate of a busy London hotel, where people sought their rest at all hours of the night or morning ; where the life of day went on actively, till near'y daybreak ; and where the quietness of the hours usually devoted to sleep, never seemed to assume the absolute calmness which scares a night

watcher, of timid mood, into needless apprehensions and foolish imaginary conceptions. I was not given to be womanish; but, without acknowledging that I was overtaken by a symptom so objectionable, on this occasion, I was comfortably cognisant of the sounds of active life around me, when I at last sought my chamber.

"Well, old fellow, have I hunted you to earth at last? I have had no end of trouble. Waiters thought you *might* be here—they would see—instead of which dutiful conduct they went about their own or anybody's business but mine. I addressed myself to the bookkeeper, and heard that number twenty would find you. So here I am, Yorke! And how are you, old man?"

"All right, Tom; and glad to see you; I have a world of news for you. But, first, how is your wife?"

"Oh, Helen is very well, thanks. You must come out and see her soon. We arrived in London some days ago; and

I have been waiting impatiently for you."

"Can I credit my own ears?" I said, laughingly. "Benedict already longing for liberty?"

Tom echoed my laugh; but, taking his happiness for granted, and too real and positive a fact for unnecessary jubilation, after the fashion of bridegrooms merging into husbands, said,—

"Hang it all, Yorke! Love is all very well; but a man cannot for ever be tied to a woman's apron strings; and I want now to get into harness again. How about the Dalrymple practice? Is it all signed, sealed and delivered; I mean will the old boy come to terms?"

"Yes, Chance, that is all right; and you can be installed in your new berth when you like—that is, when you have made some little technical arrangements with Dr Angus, which I could not very well settle for you."

"Percentage on profits?" inquired Tom.

"The very thing, Chance."

"I thought so. Well, I am glad that little affair is settled. It is awfully good of you, old man, to take all this bother for me!"

Tom said this with a certain careless courtesy, which betrayed an undercurrent of assurance that he was bestowing as great a benefit as he received. He conveniently ignored the means by which the partnership had been effected, the terms of purchase, and the difficulties which he knew must have been overcome. However, I knew my friend's estimate of his own professional abilities. He was assured that all the world of Dalrymple, myself included, ought to be honoured by his consent to throw away his skill upon a country practice, however remunerative.

"And now, Yorke, let us have a turn out if you have breakfasted. Helen wanted to go to the Royal Academy, and, if you have nothing better to do, you may as well join us. We are in lodgings—Kensington

way. A poor devil of a doctor cannot find the ready for all his necessities; so he has to eschew hotels, and clubs, and all the luxuries of the rich. Love in a cottage is a mythical bliss. However, Helen is my wife now, and I am very fond of her. I mean to make the best of things, and whatever may happen, to carry no sorry face through the world."

"Perhaps you will also guard your wife against such a lamentable appearance?"

I said dryly.

Tom laughed.

"Yorke, you are down upon a man in a moment. You are too literal. Do you think me likely to make any woman rue who married me, least of all such a woman as Helen, whose angelic sweetness might propitiate a barbarian?"

"No, Tom, you are too good-tempered and easy-going to play the tyrant; but if there be anything I detest, it is a fortune-hunter—a man who practically disowns his manhood by desiring to be maintained by

his wife, instead of cheerfully working for her support and his own."

"This is all very fine in theory, Yorke ; but you have no right to condemn a man for yielding to a temptation which you can never experience yourself. In your position you are free from such sordid necessities. However, I am not going to argue the matter. I have married Helen, and am far from repenting of my bargain ; and if in joke, and by way of contrast, I contemplate the material advantages of a rich wife, it is no insult to my own."

"I am sure not, Tom !" I said warmly.

At the same time the thought passed through my mind that it was perhaps as well, for Helen's future comfort, that Edward Ormonde's will had secured her from the trial of having to make her husband contented with bread and cheese and kisses.

"Tom," I said, "what if you have won a rich wife after all ; or, if not that, at

least one with some prospects of money in the future?"

Tom laughed immoderately.

"A rich wife!" he said ironically. "Old Grain's odd hundred may do something towards furnishing; but there is no better luck to come to me through my wife. By-the-way, I should say Ormonde—the fellow signed his will so; but he may have had as many names as whims—he was full enough of the latter, as Helen found to her cost."

"It is lucky for you that he had another name," I said pointedly.

"What in the name of fortune do you mean, Yorke? You used to be a matter-of-fact fellow enough. Why do you say senseless words that mean nothing?"

"I say what I mean, Tom; that there is every possibility that your wife may, if not now, at some future day enrich you; and that because Mr Grain's real name was Ormonde."

"How do you mean? What do you know?" he replied excitedly.

"Ormonde was the son of a lawyer in Buckinghamshire, and when his stepmother dies, and she is old, his father's money *should* revert to Edward Ormonde, and Helen is his legatee, as you know."

"What the deuce does it all mean, Yorke? I am bewildered, and here we are at home, so Helen may help me to unravel this mystery. Come in, Yorke!"

And he led the way to a small room, where Helen awaited us; she had seen us both already through the window, and had smiled her welcome; but Tom took her in his arms and hugged her affectionately.

"My dear, you are a woman of property; a mine of untold wealth has opened out for us. Tell her, Yorke! I am simply nonplussed, and feel altogether overcome; but, most assuredly, willing to believe the prophet, so don't prove a false one, Yorke!"

Tom laughed merrily, and Helena, a good deal disconcerted by this mode of treatment before me, came forward to greet me pleasantly, if less calmly than usual.

"You must excuse him, Mr Maxwell, he is like a boy; the excitement of seeing you again has made him so wild; and he gives vent to his exuberance in strange modes, as you will know."

"A very natural and fortunate one for him, in this case, Mrs Chance. I am inclined to envy him of such happiness."

She blushed, but said quickly,—

"You need not do so; you will have as much, or more, yourself some day."

"I believe you are a prophet, Mrs Chance. I am almost sure I shall."

"What, Yorke? What is that you are saying to my wife?" said Tom.

"That my own promised wife may some day fulfil all my hopes, by being as affectionate and loving as your own. Do not think that you are to have all

the sweets of life to yourself. I can digest such good things as well as you. I am an engaged man, Tom ; so scarcely less happy than yourself."

"Yes you are, Yorke ! I was miserable till Helen married me," said Tom mischievously. "But let me congratulate you, old fellow, all the same. I wish you both joy."

He shook my hand emphatically ; and Mrs Chance said, in her soft, kind voice,—

"I am so glad, so very pleased, Mr Maxwell !"

"You will see her some day ; and be the best of friends together, I hope, Mrs Chance," I replied.

"I should like that," she said quietly. "Tom and you, and she and I—it would be quite a suitable quartette."

"Yes, but for the present it is Tom and you, and I am only a third person, witnessing your happiness—it is tantalising, to say the least."

Tom laughed, and Helen blushed, so I turned the conversation.

"Mrs Chance, I have to tell you some other news. When Mr Grain died he left me a sealed packet, which was given to me after you left Newquay."

"It was very careless of me to forget to give it you myself," Helen interrupted.

"Not at all; but I can assure you it was an important paper—it contained the history of Mr Grain's life, and revealed many circumstances which will, I fear, give you much pain."

Mrs Chance looked down sadly at her black dress, as my words reminded her of the departed.

"I need not," I continued, "distress you with these now, but, amongst other things, he mentioned his parentage; the place where his childhood was spent, and the condition or rank in life of his father. It was an honourable one; a professional career, that of a lawyer, gave him the opportunity to acquire renown, and to some

extent wealth. But I believe I am beginning too much like a sermon to continue such tall talking. The fact is, Mrs Chance, Mr Ormonde's father—the real name of Mr Grain—his father died worth money; but as his son had vexed him, he did not benefit by the will. Mrs Ormonde—that is the stepmother of *your* Mr Ormonde—has the money for her life; afterwards it reverts to you as Mr Ormonde's, *alias* Grain's, legatee. When Mrs Ormonde dies, so far as I can see, you will have the money."

Helen clasped her hands, in her effort to conceal her emotion, but her eyes were humid, as she looked at her husband, her appreciation of fortune was evidently for his sake.

"I can scarcely believe in such luck, Mr Maxwell; can it be true, Tom?" she said.

"I begin to think so," said Tom sentimentously. "And now, my dear Helen, if you were still free, and no wife, what

would have become of my chance with you?"

"Tom, how can you ask such a thing? We are married."

"I am quite conscious of that, Helen; but, if you had known of your heiress-ship before, you might have made a different—"

"You know I should not, Tom!" interrupted Helen indignantly. "It is only for your sake I am pleased, because you might tire of me when the realities of poverty, or a barely respectable living, were upon us."

"Now, you are insulting me, Helen; but I forgive you, and, without being as magnanimous as you, I must own to being considerably elated by the prospect of a rich wife, for your own sake as well as mine. We shall jog on through life together more comfortably on a good steed than on a rough cart horse."

"Oh, Tom," Helen said with pathos, "I could have been so happy with you under any circumstances."

"And I with you, Helen; but I cannot afford to be romantic, so I accept our improved fortunes gratefully. In the meantime the old lady may live longer than likely—to give you time to revel in the reality of contriving to make two ends meet."

Helen laughed, and I too, as we both always did at Tom's jocularities, containing, as it often did, so much sense and worldliness allied to humour.

When Tom and I were again alone together; my explanation had to be more minute. He wanted to see the account, in black and white; but I would not produce the narrative. I told him that it contained particulars which concerned only myself and my own family; and that it was unfair to others to make him, though my own chosen friend, acquainted with them all.

But of course his first question was, "Why Ormonde had been disinherited?"

I gave the history of his career in

detail; and Tom was immensely indignant that his wife had ever been "a slave to that ugly villain, that confounded scoundrel—*his* wife nursing a murderer—she should not wear black another day for him!"

"And how about becoming his legatee?" I asked.

Whereon Tom quietened down, and again applied himself to business relating to that piece of luck.

"I must prove his will at once, Yorke. Confound it, though; it is not pleasant to think of the poor wretch as a murderer. I suppose it will be all right, as far as it goes—a convicted felon could not dispose of any property, I believe. But it depends upon the terms of old Mr Ormonde's will a good deal, whether his son could nominate any one to succeed to his interest in the property. If it is left to Edward Ormonde or his heirs, we are done for," Tom added soberly. "On the whole, things are not so satisfactory

as they seemed. We must have a lawyer to guide us in this business."

"That will be of little use till we have proved Mr Grain's identity with the said Edward Ormonde," I replied. "What shall you tell Helen about all this? She will feel it dreadfully, I should think."

"Yes! Could we not keep it from her—his villainy, I mean?" asked Tom.

"It may be broken to her by degrees; but I believe it will be best she should know," I said, "otherwise she will be constantly mentioning him—talking about him, not to you only, but to all the world; and cherishing any affection for him she may have had; it would be awkward to keep her in ignorance."

"I quite see that," said Tom; "I myself could not patiently hear any sentimental humbug about him—it angers me to think that my pure darling has ever been contaminated by such an association."

Tom was irate, but still determined to do his best to get the property.

"You will have to produce that precious paper of yours," he said.

"We shall see," I replied; "in the course of justice I must do violence to private feeling if necessary. But perhaps I may be spared this, to me, painful proceeding."

"It does not follow that all the world must know about it," said Tom, "because a few people, who can decide upon the subject of Ormonde's identity, do so."

"That is true," I replied. "And, Tom, I do not know in what manner you think of legally establishing the veracity of Edward Ormonde's statement; but I fancy the stepmother is the person to apply to, in the first place. From her we shall learn further particulars about the will of Mr Ormonde, senior; and she may probably recognise the handwriting of her stepson, and testify to the truthfulness, or otherwise, of his account of the details of his early transgressions and mode of living. It is evident that, unless

the old clerk still lives, she is the only person, except Edward Ormonde himself, who would know of the forgery ; as, according to his own telling, Mr Ormonde shielded his son from public dishonour, and kept his secret so well, that even Miss Earl could only guess that he had offended his father beyond hope of pardon, by some serious misdemeanour."

"As a preliminary step, I could not suggest a better one, Yorke," said Tom. "But the old woman may have motives of her own for not wishing to assist us ; and as for old Ormonde's will, we can get to know all about that at Doctors' Commons."

"Yes, but will not Mrs Ormonde be our best informant ? It will be more gentlemanly and correct to advise her first of the death of her stepson ; and I do not expect that an old lady would lend herself willingly to a scheme to withhold any money from her late husband's son, or his heirs, at her death.

Her only motive could be to benefit her own family, and the money will doubtless be so left as to revert to a more distant member of Mr Ormonde's own family, failing Edward Ormonde's claim to it."

"Perhaps you are right, old man. What a lawyer you would have made. But all you say makes me see that Helen's chance is doubtful; she is not a relation of Edward Ormonde, thank goodness; and you infer that a sensible man would not make a will to leave his money outside his immediate family. However, I do not understand law; the point is—could Edward Ormonde make a will to leave property to another, which he *expected* to possess, had he lived long enough? And if so, and the senior Mr Ormonde had left the same property to his son Edward, or his heirs, would Helen be considered, in virtue of the son's nomination, to be that heir? Well, it is worth trying for, and I am

all impatience to have the matter settled. When shall we run down to Wear, as the town is called, which has the proud honour of giving birth to that arrant rascal?"

"If you can manage to leave Helen for a couple of days, we will be off to-morrow," I said; "as after my uncle's return I shall have less spare time."

"The very thing," said Tom. "Helen will be all right—she must get used to being left, and be contented with the usual Darby and Joan business."

He seemed so delighted at the prospect of variety, that I wondered whether the hour would ever arrive when Maude's presence would be regarded as a restriction on my liberty, and be quitted with some degree of relief.

"Do not look so grave, Yorke—as if you thought me wanting in marital consideration. The lover's moon has waxed and waned; and, by all established precedents, I am a sober married man, free

to leave my wife a little more to her own devices, and to follow my own sweet will."

We both laughed, and then fixed the hour for our journey; and then Tom remembered that Helen must be apprised of his intention, and be flattered by his attentions during the intervening hours, and later, by his regretful departure. The manner of "those deceitful men," the ladies would say. But is it not a more natural assumption that the prospect of separation begets tenderer feelings which culminate in the parting moment, and *that*, even when the journey has been planned with eager satisfaction, and is taken with keen enjoyment.





CHAPTER II.

MRS ORMONDE.

MRS ORMONDE was a bright intelligent old lady, and she received us, strangers as we were, with affability, and a kind of motherly interest—a manner which you notice in very old people of the best type, who seem, when about to leave this nether world, to enlarge their sympathetic power till they can enfold all the denizens of earth within it; who look with softened eyes on the world around, longing to be in fuller harmony with it

before the end ; who regard with especial compassion those who have still to face the battle of life—who smile on such, wishful to make them braver for the fight by the cheery reminder that strife will end, and a season of peaceful ease ensue, when they can rejoice in a well-earned victory.

Mrs Ormonde appeared to be more than eighty years old, but she still retained all her faculties. Mentally, she was as vigorous as ever, but her bodily powers were enfeebled. She sat constantly by the fireside, as she had been a martyr to rheumatism in her middle age, and it had left her a helpless cripple. She could not use her lower limbs at all, and her hands and arms very little. She was taken in her chair to an adjoining room at night, and lifted into bed ; and in the morning was dressed, and again wheeled to the drawing-room. A cheerless life enough to most people ; but her eyesight was perfect, and she took the greatest

interest in her surroundings. Her room was consequently quite a picture of elegance and cleanliness. Rare paintings were on the wall; dainty pieces of old-fashioned china were visible in different corners; books of modern thought were conspicuous on her tables, as well as numerous other articles of *vertu*.

Thus the crippled old woman kept up her interest in the growing life of the day, and by this she maintained her power to attract others, even in the blight of infirmity and the decay of nature.

Her life was not dull; for visitors, both young and middle-aged, were often there; and not with charitable intents only, for her sympathy won their hearts, and her intelligence and wisdom instructed them; or, if they would decline such a humbling confession of sitting at the feet of superior knowledge, she, at least, interested them, and it is seldom that calls are made with any prospect of amusement or profit in this fashionable world.

In appearance Mrs Ormonde was not remarkable, but pleasing. She was stouter than most aged women, and her face was consequently less wrinkled; but her complexion had entirely lost its freshness—there was not a trace of colour in her face or hands; but her eyes were bright, and of that dark shade which seems never to fade. Her hair was like silver—not a dull grey, but a bright, glossy white; it was smoothed carefully and folded into two round curls, one above another, on each side, which were kept in place by tortoiseshell combs. A pretty lace cap, with pink trimmings, relieved the dulness of the skin; and the bright colouring seemed to harmonise with and almost to efface the yellow tint, and the countenance altogether borrowed freshness from this well chosen headgear. A grey dress, relieved by spotlessly white lingerie, and a soft Shetland shawl, mixed with a little pink of the same shade as the cap, completed the attire of this charming old lady.

Tom Chance had appointed me spokesman on the occasion, but I felt reluctant to disturb the placidity of our hostess by recalling the past to her. I need not have feared; she was as keenly alive to that as the present, and saw all in the light of the future. Her calmness could not be ruffled. She had arrived at that period when every circumstance is of little moment—disease, sin, sorrow, joy, are dispassionately experienced, mercifully sympathised with for others; but for herself, waiting the final departure from the scene where such played their parts, they had no disturbing influence.

As a calm critic, she watched the drama of life, and, as such, she received my story. When we informed her that Edward Ormonde had taken the life of his cousin, she bowed her head in silence for a moment, and I feared that her composure was disturbed; but her face was still calm, when she looked up and said,—

“I feared this; I always thought that

wretched, misguided boy was Jane's murderer. You say he is dead. I cannot pray for him again, as I have done during all these years; but God is merciful. Had he any children? There must be some reason for your coming here to tell me all this," she said, with that acuteness which was natural to her.

"We have a reason; but first, dear madam, I must tell you that he had no children, only an adopted daughter."

The old lady looked troubled for a moment.

"I must think about it," she said. "I do not know how to act; she is not his own child, and there are those belonging to me whom I would fain help. My great niece, Sophy, has tended me for years; she is a good girl and dutiful."

She glanced, as she spoke, at a lady of about forty, who was evidently her constant companion, and whom she, from her superior seniority, regarded as yet a girl. This lady had taken no part in the con-

versation, but had withdrawn herself to a distant corner of the large room, so that she might be no check upon ours.

"I will do what is right," Mrs Ormonde continued; "but I must think it all out quietly. Tell me about this child that he adopted."

I gave her Helen's history in the most attractive manner that I could, touching lightly upon her stepson's inconsiderate treatment of her, but contriving to be a clever exponent of Helen's virtues.

"I must see this Helen," she said. "Is she left all alone? She has had no light duty to bear, in her service to that poor, tempted creature; he was selfish and exacting."

"I did not say so, dear madam," I said.

"No! But I knew him," she replied; "you have been reticent; and, by what you have left unsaid, I can better believe your account of the rest—I can judge it that there is no exaggeration in your statement."

felt very much confused, at this testi-

mony to my truthfulness, and said with hesitation,—

“I feel honoured by your confidence, and hope to retain it.”

“I have little doubt of that,” she replied, to encourage me.

I believe there are few men who would not have felt, as I did, exceedingly gratified at this compliment from so old and honoured a person ; she was so self-reliant and conscious of her own discrimination, that, without prior knowledge of her, you accepted these qualities by faith. That people may credit you with abilities, you must first truly estimate and be assured of your own right to their credit. There is less discrimination than coincidence of judgment in the ordinary class of mind ; and so self-esteem plays an important part in our success in life—not only that it stimulates our own efforts, but because it directs the opinion and appreciation of others ; but, at the same time, it is a characteristic which is some-

times of rank growth, on wayside ground, and does not come up, as a flower, in the midst of a garden. There is, in other words, self-esteem without the cultivation of qualities to command it; and its display then fully merits censure and ridicule.

But to return to Mrs Ormonde. She said,—

“You have not yet told me what has become of this fair Helen? You see I am an old person and privileged—my remark may seem like taking a liberty, but I cannot help conceiving the possibility that one or other of you two gentlemen must be personally interested in my stepson’s adopted daughter—this is how I account for your visit to an old woman like myself. But I am very glad to see you both; you are sincerely welcome, for I am not often favoured with the company of young gentlemen, though all my friends are very good to me—very attentive and considerate; I can complain of no neglect in my old age.”

"I have no doubt they find great pleasure in paying those attentions," I said politely.

"I see you are somewhat of a flatterer," she said with a smile; "and I am too vain to turn a deaf ear; perhaps, when I was younger, you might have found more difficulty in getting me to accept your meaning—flatterers are rarer now; and, like old china, valued on the score of scarceness."

"I don't quite believe they can be so uncommon, in your case, Mrs Ormonde; if it would not be impertinent, I might suggest that you are like the old china yourself."

She laughed merrily, despite her eighty years, and, unwilling to continue the same strain, said,—

"Sophy, child, you might ring for the wine now—I am old-fashioned, and like my guests to drink my good health; and really, Sophy, I feel a little faint myself—you see, my dear, I am getting old."

"Dear aunt," said her niece anxiously, "you have been far too long without something, and all this news is too much for you. Will you not ask these gentlemen to call another time?"

"It is nothing, my dear,—I mean their conversation; nothing can agitate me now. I only want to set matters straight before I go. But I am a little tired; and, after a glass of wine, we will have a few more words together, gentlemen, and then renew our acquaintanceship another day."

We both rose, hat in hand, wishing to retire immediately; but the brave old lady waved us back again to our seats, with a commanding, though slow movement of her head. We talked to her niece while she drank her wine and ate a biscuit, which she softened by dipping constantly in her glass; this rested on a sort of tray-table, which was attached to her chair, and movable, so that it could be adjusted as was most convenient for

her hands ; she did not like to give unnecessary trouble to her attendants. She watched us as, to please her, we also slowly sipped a glass of wine ; but it was altogether a long performance, for the dear old lady, though a marvel for her age, took her slight repast leisurely. It revived her, however, and she beckoned me to her side again.

“ Which of you is it ? ” she asked.

I understood her, rightly, to mean which was Helen’s lover, and answered,—

“ My friend, Mr Chance, has married the young lady whom your stepson adopted ; and, to be brief, Mr Edward Ormonde has left a will making Helen the legatee of any property to which he may have a right. He did not then know that Helen and Mr Chance were likely to marry ; nor did we any of us know till he was dead, and they were man and wife, that she was entitled to more than one hundred pounds which Mr Edward Ormonde left in the bank to his credit. Afterwards, when

I had seen a narrative which he left for me—and which I thought of so little consequence, that I did not read it for several weeks after his death—we found that his real name and parentage had been purposely concealed ; and we concluded, from a remark of his, that though you had a life-interest in the late Mr Ormonde's property, the principal would come in the course of time to Edward Ormonde or his successor. Besides this, we wanted you to assure us of the truthfulness of Edward Ormonde's story."

"So far as I know, it is true," she replied. "All relating to his life here, and the attempted robbery of his poor father, and the emigration to Australia, is quite correct. No one else could know all this except he had told them. About the rest I cannot vouch ; but I have no doubt, in my own mind, that the person you describe was my stepson. To make matters clearer, when you come again, show me his handwriting—I should know it again

easily, by the peculiar pointedness of all the letters ; and by the short, abrupt, long letters."

"You will be sure to recognise it, then ; for the writing we have has such characteristics ?" I interrupted.

"About the will," she continued, "you are mistaken—he was misled. It is true it was left to him at my death ; but at my discretion it was to be withheld. It is quite in my power—my good husband relied upon my honour," she said proudly.

"Who would not ?" I replied.

She smiled, quite gratified by my remark, and continued, in a low whisper,—

"If I had been the girl I should have made a wiser choice between you two gentleman ; but I do not object to your friend—he looks a little self-satisfied, and he has a weak mouth ; he needs a good directing influence."

"Which he has !" I answered hastily.

"Helen will be no ordinary wife ; she is gentle, but not weak—she will not shirk

any duty that she sees, nor allow him to do so, though she will not assert her own influence unpleasantly."

Mrs Ormonde nodded her head in a pleased manner several times.

"I must see this paragon of yours," she said. "I had an idea at first that you were the one; but I see it was altogether wrong. You do not look like a disappointed man?" she added, examining my face critically with her keen eyes.

I laughed; but replied immediately,—

"No, Mrs Ormonde! I trust my future wife will not disappoint me, though she is a very different kind of lady to the one we have been talking about."

"That's well!" said the friendly old lady. "I like young people to be satisfied. I wonder what she is like now?"

I smiled, but gratified her curiosity, by replying,—

"She is little; vivacious and impulsive; but noble hearted and high principled."

"The highest praise," she said with an amused accent—"a lover's."

"But yet the truth," I said eagerly. .

She still smiled as she said, looking at my friend, who was talking politely to the girl of mature years called Sophy,—

"He is a young doctor, you say—poor as a surgery mouse, of course. Well, I am not decided what is right to do. As I said before, it is not the same as if she were my husband's flesh and blood relation; and I have my own to consider. But I will do what seems best—what is most just—even if it may disappoint those who have expected more from me. To-morrow bring me the writing, and I will tell you what I mean to do. And now, sirs," she said, in a louder voice, addressing us both, "you will excuse an old woman if she drives you away that she may rest, and think. You need not come too early to-morrow, as I am not visible till twelve—I indulge myself by rising late," she said, as we shook hands and left.

"By Jove!" said Tom irreverently, as

we stepped out into the world and the sunshine, "I feel as if I had come out of Noah's ark. I have not seen an old body like that for ages."

"Nor I, ever," I replied. "She is a remarkable old lady, shrewd, sensible, unselfish and brave."

"You come to conclusions very rapidly, Yorke. I have made no such discoveries—she is a deep old lady, no doubt; but I must know more of her before I can certify as to her possession of those other redeeming qualities that you mention. What was that I heard her telling you about her husband having left all in her power? My game's up if that is the case—men should not trust their wives so foolishly."

My friend was quite angry, and I teased him.

"Why, Chance, my good fellow, you are a traitor to your wife already. I should have thought you would uphold the doctrine of faith in a wife's wisdom, in these early days of matrimony."

"A wife's wisdom be hanged!" said Tom angrily. "What have you been doing to that old woman? I thought she was going to kiss you when we left—she looked so benignant. I'll be shot if I would have submitted to that, if you had, Yorke—an old grandmother like that slobbering one's face with her caresses."

Tom laughed himself into good-humour at the notion, and that over, I said seriously,—

"Tom, I think the good old soul means to do very fairly by Helen; and perhaps, after all, it will be the easiest way out of the difficulty. If she wills the estate to Helen herself, there will be no need to establish Edward Ormonde's identity, and no end of legal difficulties will be avoided."

"I am pretty sanguine as a rule, Yorke," said my friend; "but I am down on my luck in this case; when an old woman has absolute power to bequeath her dead husband's property, you may take my word

for it, her own poor relations will be the only beneficiaries. Heigh-ho ! I must work all the harder, and trust to Providence that a family of a dozen odd may not be the result of an imprudent marriage."

I had very little patience with Tom for harping so constantly on the same string—it was no compliment to his wife, and I said angrily,—

"You have not enough generosity yourself, Tom, to imagine what would be the result of it in others. I would stake my honour on the fairness or justice of Mrs Ormonde's disposition of the property ; and as for any imprudence in your own marriage, Helen is the only one to complain. She might have chosen a more suitable mate, in my opinion, who would not have held his happiness quite so cheaply."

Tom laughed good-humouredly. It was quite impossible to quarrel with him ; he said,—

"Dear old man, when my wife needs a champion, I shall send her to you. But let

us forget about this horrid business now—a *table-d'hôte* is not a bad institution, is it? If fellows are thrown too much together, they are apt to become cross-grained; but in a country town like this, one is compelled to be contented with less sociability. However, Yorke, we will have a table in the coffee-room; and if there are any decent fellows about, we will finish up with cards or billiards."

I saw that I had made myself disagreeable, so set to work to redeem my character. We talked over the old days at school, with all the enjoyment we experienced at the time in spending them; and we smoked and laughed, and were, in fact, as jolly as two fellows need be till bedtime.

In the morning we kept our appointment with Mrs Ormonde. There was no difference in her reception of us: her manner was as calm as before, as kindly, and so benignant as to be almost affectionate. We had thought that she might not yesterday

have fully realised our tidings—she had been so apparently unmoved by the knowledge that her stepson had died, and had been guilty of such an awful crime. And we thought that, when she had time for quiet contemplation, the enormity of this offence would overpower her—that the idea would be dreadful to her, that one with whom she had lived, and who was, though ever so wicked, still the son of the husband whom she had loved had been a murderer.

We were mistaken. She had now thought it all over, and remained placid, though pitiful, towards the criminal. In her great age, everything that happened affected her as a dream might. Everything seemed to be outside her world, except duty. Passion had been outlived, and had left instead that calmness and prudence which realised the insignificance of earthly disquietudes.

She at once asked to see the handwriting of her supposed stepson, and she examined it so critically that we began to

doubt whether she knew it. We showed her the will, and she read it slowly for herself, with the help of spectacles; and leaning back in her chair, remained for a time silent, looking straight before her, as if she beheld some invisible person in the room. But we found she was in deep thought, and perfectly unrestrained by our presence, regardless of any conventional recognition of it, she continued absorbed in reflection. Age is generally deliberate alike in thought and action.

But at last our patience and Tom's anxiety were rewarded by her words.

"Gentlemen, I think of acting as this will directs. My husband had no interest in any member of my own family, except myself. He naturally wished that his son should enjoy the money at my death; and I feel that he left me in power only to prevent any bad use of the money. He may have had doubts as to the propriety of leaving his son anything; but I am certain he intended that his grand-

children should have it; failing these, I do not suppose he desired to leave it to my people, kind as he was; he had a great notion of the claims of kindred. I want to do exactly what is just; but there are no relatives of his own remaining who have, in my opinion, the same claim to the money as Edward Ormonde's adopted child—the one who patiently tended him, and whom he named as his legatee. There is not a blood relationship between her and my dear husband; but she is nearer to him by adoption than any of my own family; and I have a conviction within me that it would have been his wish. As for Sophy, I have still the means of making her comfortable. Do not look so imploringly, child, nor think hardly of me for not studying first the welfare of one so dear to me. I am an old woman, and wish to do right."

Sophy drew near, and bending over her tenderly, said,—

"I want you not to trouble yourself

about me, dear aunt. You must live for many years yet to be my companion and help. After that I do not desire your money."

"I know it, child! Go back to your seat and do not flurry yourself and me."

But she patted her hand kindly and patronisingly, as a younger person would that of an inexperienced girl.

Tom Chance now found his tongue, and thanked her on Helen's behalf and his own, praising her generosity with effusion. She received his thanks graciously, and explained further,—

"I had not the slightest doubt yesterday that *your* Edward Ormonde was my poor husband's son; but since seeing the handwriting I am confirmed in that opinion. I am as certain that the man who wrote this"—she touched the paper still on her lap—"was Edward Ormonde as I am that I sit on this chair. I do not know that everybody would regard my opinion as valuable. There is a fashion

of overlooking old people, and considering them weak and incapable of judgment. But no one can dispute my will; and I shall send for my lawyer this day and give him my instructions. But I must see your wife, Mr Chance. She must come and stay a few days with me. You can spare her to an old woman, I suppose?" she asked, with a comical smile on her intelligent old face.

Tom looked confused, and I could not help being amused when I remembered his own alacrity at leaving Helen. It was evident that he did not relish the notion of lending his dearest possession to another.

"It is only fair, as you have left her alone, to allow your wife the same privilege; is it, Mr Maxwell?"

"Quite right, if she wishes, Mrs Ormonde," I replied.

"She will not very much wish to be the guest of an old woman, perhaps; but it is right that she should come. I must judge for myself whether she is indeed

the treasure you have described. If I should find her deficient in sterling worth, it might be just that I should act differently."

She smiled and looked at Tom earnestly, and he replied quickly,—

"She shall come whenever you like, Mrs Ormonde."

"And," I added, "there is no fear of your satisfaction with her. And now, Mrs Ormonde, we must not forget to thank you for your courtesy to and patience with two strangers, who brought you unpleasant tidings."

"There is no need, Mr Maxwell; your tidings you could not help, and no one could have unfolded them more gracefully and considerately."

This gracious old lady was so polite, that we might have gone on bandying compliments one against the other longer, if the attentive Sophy had not come to our aid with the professed purpose of preventing her aunt from fatiguing herself.

"God bless you," said the latter, with a parting clasp of her withered hand, "and make your young wives a blessing to you both. You can tell the young lady," she added to me, "that I shall select a choice piece of my favourite china for her wedding-gift, to remind her of a delicate compliment paid to an old woman by her future husband."

So ended my first and last visit to Wear.

Helen was a good deal discomfited by the prospect of visiting Mrs Ormonde. She did not like to leave Tom, and she was quite unused to associating with English ladies of condition. It was therefore a trial to her; and she was more anxious than she need have been as to the result. I felt assured that Mrs Ormonde was only joking when she threatened to withdraw her favour by disinheriting Helen, if she chanced to disapprove of her. But Tom regarded her intention as serious, and insisted upon

Helen going, and, when there, being cautious in her conduct.

"I cannot, Tom! You know I cannot make myself any better or different," she said despairingly.

"Do not try, Mrs Chance," I said; "be natural, and all will be well. Mrs Ormonde is very acute, and if you attempted to act a part she would discover you. She is a very kind-hearted old lady, and you need not be at all afraid of her welcome. She will be like a mother to you; and if you are as impressionable as myself, she will win your heart at the outset."

Helen was comforted by this, and set off to Wear in good spirits. Tom was like a fish out of water after her departure, and uneasy besides, as to Mrs Ormonde's opinion of his wife; he stuck to me like a leech, and swallowed my flattering prognostications of Helen's success at Wear with the avidity with which that hungry creature regales itself.

I reminded him that this visit might be advantageous to Helen in more respects than one. Mrs Ormonde was a lady used to the world, and of cultured and refined taste, and Helen would, in her company, and seeing her frequent visitors, get in a slight degree used to the society of English ladies—sufficiently so to be at ease with them, and to be less nervous at receiving them as her own guests, when the little world at Dalrymple sought acquaintance-ship with the new doctor's wife.

She returned soon, and relieved Tom's uneasy mind by giving a glowing description of her visit; the kindness of everybody, and Mrs Ormonde's manifest approval.

"She kissed me many times, and told me to come again soon, and as often as you could spare me, Tom." And she added, "Tell him he owes me that favour for making his wife a rich lady. With all his good points, my dear, he is not insensible to the advantage that money gives a wife."

"But you took me just as I was, I assured Mrs Ormonde," said Helen, in the triumphant voice with which she had before emphasised her words.

"Truly, my dear, that is a redeeming trait in his character, but he would have taken you even more willingly with your present prospects."

"I could not think so meanly of you as that, I told her," said Helen, "and that I was half sorry you could not be put to the proof."

"Do not be a little goose, my dear ; he loves you well enough. Be happy after your own adoring fashion, and do not heed the worldly-wise opinions of a woman of eighty. But be sure you come again to show you have forgiven me."

"What could I do, Tom, but promise to come ; and thank her warmly for all her goodness to me, even though she pretended to think you were a selfish, greedy boy ? I knew you better ; but most likely she was only teasing me after all, Tom."

“Most certainly so, Mrs Chance,” I said with gravity; and Tom gave a curious, dissatisfied

“Ugh! Defend me from women of eighty, if they try to set a man’s own wife against him.”

We all laughed, and Tom took Helen’s face in both his hands—my presence was no restraint upon him—and kissed her fondly.

“Always believe in me so, Helen, and you will make me all you wish.”

She smiled lovingly, but blushed to receive this familiarity before me. I wisely walked to the window to admire the prospect, which consisted of a paved street and tall houses full of windows beyond; sparrows as black as negroes chirping on the pavement; and a dull, grey sky above, forming the connecting link between our own and the opposite chimneys.

I went home and consoled myself with reading Maude’s letters, and writing her a score of foolish things, which seemed to me then the reverse, and were truly very

serious and faithful exponents of my own feelings at that period, when I could have touched the very pen she wrote me with, reverently, with my lips, as the honoured instrument which drew us nearer together.

I suppose men are differently constituted, and that my temperament may seem to some to be ridiculously sentimental; but the man who does not give way to an unusual amount of foolishness when wooing a woman—to the extent that his nature permits—if he in fact treats romance with contempt, he is not very deeply in love.

Maude's letters, though very dear to me, were not entirely satisfactory. The perfect confidence in my fealty, which she had assured me of, seemed deficient. Aunt Agatha probably suggested doubts of lovers generally, and Maude's own first impressions of my fickleness may have revived and tormented her in my absence.

When Maude wrote more coldly than usual I was on the verge of despair. I would then address her in the most extra-

vagantly affectionate terms ; and, describing my own misery that she should ever doubt the fervency of my love, I would express some painful belief that her own had never been given to me, and receive in return, perhaps, a most sympathetic and demonstrative, sometimes even penitent, epistle from Maude ; when I was again in the seventh heaven—wore her precious words in my heart, to speak metaphorically, and literally as near that organ of feeling as my vestments would allow.

The remembrance of the anxiety with which I looked for her letters, and my trepidation while I opened them, and read the first words, to augur good or ill from their tenour, provokes a smile even now ; but it makes me more sympathetic with lovers of every degree ; and when I am inclined to regard lightly the hopes and fears of the younger generation, and to ridicule its posture, when it figuratively bows the knee of adoration at the foot of the lady of its choice, I check myself and

go back, in imagination, to the days when the smile of fortune was as nothing to me in comparison with that of my beloved Maude.

Why do I like to describe my emotions at this period so minutely? Undoubtedly it pleases me more than my readers; unless the vanity of the feminine fair is gratified, as I have noticed is often the case, by the knowledge that most men are fools about a woman at least once in their lives.





CHAPTER III.

A RELIEVED MIND.

MY UNCLE looked the wreck of his former self, when he came back to his home tired with travelling; and though his face brightened as he saw me, I noticed the weariness of weakness too plainly in the slow smile; and our mutual recognition was saddened, the one by seeing the regret of the other, and mine by the certainty which came to me that we met only to part at some early day for ever.

Nina busied herself about the invalid, and would allow no one but herself to assist him; he leaned upon her shoulder

for support as they walked slowly to the library—that room which had received so many of our confidences in happier days, and which was my uncle's favourite room. He leaned back in his chair, and his hands hung listlessly by his side, while a look of deep disappointment settled on his face.

"I had hoped to come back a renovated man, Yorke; but I am worse, you see—far worse. But we must not despond. Do not look at me as if you were scared, but cheer up, Yorke! Let us spend the rest of our time together as happily as we can!"

"Yes!" said Nina, in her clear voice, with that pathetic tone which, as touchingly as her chastened face, expressed previous suffering, "Osmyth is over-fatigued at present—we shall all look brighter tomorrow, after resting, and this excitement is bad. How thankful I am that you have borne the journey so well, dear love!"

"She has taken such care of me!" he

said, acknowledging his dependence upon her with a satisfied air, but with a look of love and pity at Nina.

"My dearest," she said, "it is such joy to me, such a reward for all my years of weariness."

"Poor Nina!" he answered, touching her hand languidly with his own as she stood beside him.

"I am not poor, but rich; blessed beyond what I could expect, Osymth!"

"My dear one!" he replied, still in the pitying tone which she deprecated, "but we are at home now, and you will have less worry, my Nina. And I will try to be more cheerful. Yorke will help me."

I smiled, and said,—

"We have been bachelors so long, uncle, that we have both grown dull together; but with Mrs Dalrymple to look after us, we shall improve."

He looked quite gratified that I was willing to include Nina in my sympathies, and to adopt her at once as an im-

portant member of the family. He did not express his thanks ; but as he rose and, with her assistance, quitted the room, he looked back again to smile and nod at me. I could see from his manner, as well as his words, that he had become a confirmed invalid ; and Nina gladly discharged the duties of nurse.

I have called her Nina so far, but as I invariably addressed her as Mrs Dalrymple, I will henceforth mention her by that title ; and the Nina of the romance will be known as the faithful woman who wasted her youth in lamenting her lover, and was contented, in middle age, to be his cheerful, patient attendant in sickness, and so found her sad solace for the error of her youth and its punishment.

“Yorke,” said my uncle one day, “when am I to see this lady-fair of yours. This hoity-toity Maude, who wanted such an unique possession as a husband who had craved no other love but hers ; and who seems to have so speedily surrendered her

liberty, and waived the objection she once found so insuperable. I am curious to see your choice, Yorke. How is it to be managed ?”

“Come to Dalrymple, uncle ! Let us all go there. Maude is going very soon to visit her brother.”

“And the charming Adèle ?” said my uncle, with a grimace. “The two rivals in sweet harmony and domestic juncture—not a very safe proceeding, upon my word, Yorke. You must look out for squalls, and expect no fine weather while the pair are together !”

“They will not quarrel,” I said ; “Maude is too fond of her brother to vex his wife.”

“Ah, confound the women ! They will be civil enough you may depend, Yorke—wily creatures. But I fancy yours will be a hot berth of it about then.”

I could not deny it, and laughed uncomfortably, feeling that Maude was a little inclined to be jealous of me. I did not object to the jealousy in the abstract—

it was a proof of Maude's affection for me ; but it brought unpleasant consequences in its train, and though I would not have missed seeing Maude at Dalrymple for the world, I was fully alive to the possibility of a few lovers' quarrels taking place there.

So I still pressed my uncle to go, telling him that Mrs Dalrymple would be pleased to see the old place.

"Yes," he replied musingly, "Nina would like it ; she loves the country, and finds this smoky London atmosphere detestable ; but I cannot make up my mind to venture there again—it was miserable enough when I was in health, but now it would be intolerable."

"But Mrs Dalrymple would make it all so different," I urged ; "so home-like and pleasant."

My uncle smiled softly, thinking of the time when he had longed vainly for that sweet presence in his home—that time when youth was in its heyday, and love

was a more powerful and disquieting element than it could be now.

"No, Yorke ! It cannot be ! I should have wished Nina to see it ; but afterwards—when I am gone—she will visit you and your wife there. I cannot summon resolution to face those unpleasant memories there, which are too near me constantly—here and everywhere."

"But if the mystery were brought to light, you might perhaps," I said, "lose that dislike to Dalrymple—that vague sensation of an unwelcome, haunting presence which I have felt myself sometimes ; and shall do, I firmly believe, no longer."

"It is said that murder will out, but unwisely ; for there are certainly numerous crimes, whose perpetrators escape scot free and are never discovered ; or, if so, at some time so remote that public interest has died out, and the matter has sunk into such obscurity that the tardy revelation is, to all useful intents and purposes, too late. Such, I believe, will be the case about the murder

of Jane Earl. When you and I are in our graves, Yorke, some officious personage may bring a faded parchment to one of our descendants, assuming to be the particulars of this crime ; and the recipient will cast it aside with some disgust, and declare that he has no interest in it—never heard of it, and does not wish to hear ; he will refuse to believe that such a disagreeable circumstance can be connected with his pleasant family mansion. At one time, I did not know whether to wish for the discovery of Jane's murderer or not. Now, I begin to think that Dalrymple will never be a happy home for you and yours till he is known. I have a vague idea that I battled with ghosts when we were down there last. I had most curious dreams, in which I imagined myself in that room, with a dagger in my hand ; and in the mornings I was unrefreshed and miserable. I believe the place is haunted, and that the ghosts will not let me sleep easily there."

“Your nerves were out of order, uncle,” I said quietly. “But it so happens that, during your absence, something has come to my knowledge about this affair which has eased my mind considerably; but as I cannot be certain of its effect on yours, I have not so far made any allusion to it; but as we are now on the topic, shall we try to imagine that the communication which has been made to me may clear up the whole thing?”

I waited a moment, and he looked disturbed, even agitated. At last he said,—

“It may lead to unpleasant inferences about me, and even to some very ugly facts becoming known; but what of that? I am sick of thinking about it all, and shall be glad to have the murderer convicted at any cost.”

“He is dead,” I said, “but he has left me an account of the manner of the murder, the motive that prompted it, and his own share in it; or rather, as he had

no accomplice, his own sole responsibility for its perpetration."

I saw that the excitement was exhausting my uncle's strength, so I gave him a dose of brandy, and said,—

"We will talk it all over again."

"No, Yorke! I am better now, and impatient to hear about it. Who was he?"

"You recollect," I replied, "when Chance had that post of *locum tenens* to a doctor on the east coast? I joined him there; and you may have heard me mention a man named Grain, a patient of Chance's, who had a pretty female relative, as we then thought—the one whom Chance has married. We became intimate with him, owing to that latter circumstance."

"I remember it quite well, Yorke. I had a half notion that you were falling in love with the girl yourself."

I smiled and declared, "That, notwithstanding all my previous entanglements,

I had never really loved any woman but Maude."

He smiled also ; but seemingly impatient of my digression, said,—

" Well, Yorke, this man Grain ? "

" Took so great a fancy to me that he thought fit to recount, in writing, the particulars of his most detestable life for my benefit ; but he had a motive in doing so, for he proved himself to be Edward Ormonde, the quondam lover of Miss Earl and her brutal murderer."

" Edward Ormonde ! " exclaimed my uncle excitedly. " Was it he ? I thought the villain was out of the country at the time."

" So he had been, but he had returned shortly before as if, as he would have said, fate directed him to this deadly purpose."

" I do not understand it yet, Yorke ; but you must tell me all in detail. I have a right to know, and you must keep nothing back from me. Jane Earl's murderer discovered, and gone to meet his

judgment at a higher than any earthly bar! It is inconceivable, Yorke. I cannot realise it in a moment. But before you tell more, say, did this dastardly villain tell you that he had a witness of his crime? Did he see that witness, or was he, in the mad execution of his fell intent, blind to all extraneous incidents?"

"No, he was keenly alive to everything. He saw even the boy in his cot, and he recognised the other spectator, and intended, in the heat of the moment, to commit a double murder. Luckily, owing to a change of position, the intended second victim escaped, and the murderer's courage failed him meanwhile, so that he sought only his own safety."

"My God!" exclaimed my uncle. "I was nearer death at that moment than I am now. It was I, Yorke. I saw this crime, and kept my secret till now. It has been a heavy one lately, and I am not sorry to make you my confidant. It is a relief to speak out freely."

"I knew it before, uncle. That man disclosed this secret also, thinking to sow the seeds of mischief in doing so."

"But he did not succeed, Yorke! I can see by your face that your heart is unchanged; that your old uncle is not discarded, because you are acquainted with another youthful folly. It shall be explained, Yorke; but now, find the narrative and read it to me."

I did so, and he listened attentively, giving vent to his feelings now and again by such words as "scoundrel," "contemptible villain."

I ended, and he was silent for a long time. Then he said,—

"It appears, Yorke, that my life was spared at that time almost by a miracle; it hung upon a thread as it were. That thread was the little boy in the cot. You have been a blessing to me from the first Yorke!"

"Say rather, uncle, that you owe your life to your own humanity. The hand

that I felt over my mouth was yours, not the murderer's. You were screening me from the consequences that a luckless exclamation might bring upon me ; but I was tongue-tied at that moment and could not have called out."

"Till that moment I had not seen you," interrupted my uncle. "I was then angry at my father's injustice, and with you, the little innocent cause of it ; a wretched little imp of a boy who was held up as a threat to force me into marriage. But my feelings underwent a change. I pitied the poor little fellow who was cowering in his bed, and I went to you to support you by my presence, and to interpose mine between you and harm. It proved to be my own safeguard.

"After the villain's escape, I dared give no alarm lest I should implicate myself. The weapon was still there, and suspicion might fall upon me. I was at first too paralysed by fear, horror, and surprise to stir a step beyond your cot ; my brain

refused to suggest action. I could not collect my thoughts sufficiently to act with promptitude, otherwise the man might have been pursued, and my story verified by his capture. By the time I recovered my senses this was impossible.

“It was the most terrible night I ever passed, Yorke! I looked at you and imagined the fright had killed you. You were perfectly motionless, in that fearful stupor from which you were so long in recovering consciousness. You looked like the dead, and without waiting to assure myself and ascertain whether you were still breathing, I left you.

“I looked at Jane. She was without doubt a corpse; and I lingered no longer in the room where such horrors surrounded me. I hastily but stealthily found my way across the passage and up the stairs, which alarmed me by creaking beneath my feet.

“I regained my room, still carrying the candle which I had set out with—the

very candle looked conscious, and seemed to remind me of what I had witnessed. I dreaded the darkness; but I extinguished the light lest it should betray me. No one must know that I had been awake and astir during the dreadful night.

“I threw myself on the bed, and, I believe, despite of everything, I must have either slept or fainted, for the servants knocked loudly and repeatedly at my door before I opened it.

“The awful truth was broken to me—so they thought—and, I suppose, my wild looks expressed surprise and grief. In the midst of it all, I had a thrill of satisfaction, when they informed me that my poor little nephew had been removed in an unconscious condition to the house-keeper’s room, that he still lived, and the doctor had been sent for.

“The latter came, and he talked to me privately about the murder, and advised me, as suspicion might fall on all sorts of

unlikely people, myself amongst the number, to keep away from you. 'The child is the only witness; there is little doubt that he knows something of this melancholy event, and that he has been stunned by mental anguish, as there is no appearance of any external violence; well, it is best for you to keep away from the child, and I shall forbid any one but the housekeeper to have access to him. They might confuse his memory—suggestions may afterwards be supposed to have been given him. Let me advise you, Mr Osmyth, to keep away from the boy; in fact, in my medical capacity, I insist upon the patient being kept quiet and entirely under Mrs Mayne's care—hers exclusively, no other person to see him.'

"So it happened, Yorke, that we did not meet again till the inquest. The intervening time was wretched—I think I was melancholy mad. But though some people suspected me of the crime, more pitied me for the symptoms of grief

which they thought showed themselves in my manner.

“I was more horrified than grieved—most truly sorry I was for Jane’s sad end ; but no disappointment, as a lover, was added to my other cares. And now, Yorke, I will explain my unlucky presence in that poor victim’s room.

“You see that my father was anxious that I should marry Jane Earl ; that I had promised her marriage, and that my honour was involved in keeping that promise. At the time I gave it, I imagine there was some love on my side. I believe now that there was never any on hers. However, though absence makes the heart grow fonder, that is previously fond *enough*, when there is only a weakly root to start with, its growth decreases and dwindles down from little to less, till its final decay. So it was in my case.

“And Nina, in all her beauty and artlessness, won the recreant knight. Even this passion had run its course ; but death

was the conqueror here, before whose sway passion needs must cease ; but regret, and the sweet memory of what has been, is sometimes more powerful than the reality.

“My father died, even while the turf was yet green over the supposed grave of my darling. I returned to find that Jane intended to marry me—that she did not treat me with the contempt that I deserved, but welcomed me with the most open display of affection and expectation. I felt that I could do no less than respond, till the second evening after my arrival, when we had a few words, because I refused to tell her the reason of my long silence—the discontinuance of my love letters to herself.

“Then she told me of the will, in your favour, which she said was in her room in safe keeping, and should be used if I were refractory. I was very much annoyed, and for the first time meditated rebellion.

“A marriage of convenience is hateful at any time ; but when a man is driven

into it, by a plot to dispossess him of his own, if he refuses, the coercion becomes too humiliating.

"There was a battle between my pride and my prudence. I did not like the idea of my future wife having persuaded my father to do this. Jane, in her anger, made no secret of this little *finesse* on her part.

"I was very much hurt. I declined to see the little son of my once beloved sister, because he was a source of vexation to me. All the following day, Jane and I were civil to each other, and no more. She thought I should give in, and so I might have; but it would never have been from compulsion. I would marry the woman who had spent the best of her days in waiting for her unwilling lover; but I would first possess myself of the will so cruelly made by my father.

"To accomplish this, in the middle of the night, I stole like a thief to her room. I fancied that it might be a mythical will; thinking with reason that, if Jane were

clever enough to outwit me, through my father, she might do so on her own account, and have made and signed the obnoxious will for my father in her own imagination only.

“I was wrong in this conjecture—Jane’s statement was accurate. I searched the drawers, and had the will in my hand, congratulating myself upon my adroitness, when a slight noise caused me to turn round and see—the murder.

“I know now that Jane had detected me; that her eyes were probably fixed upon me with their last effort of vision—the man stole upon her unawares, and she was dead before she had withdrawn her wondering gaze from myself.

“I feel now that it may have been my unfortunate presence there which occasioned the murder. But I do not know—the man was in a murderous mood—the weapon ready to hand, and Jane might in any case have been his victim, for she would certainly have been in no conciliatory

mood when he thus invaded her chamber. I will try and console myself with this supposition ; but, all the same, I cannot forget that I aggravated the villain, and that he attributed to me the vilest of reasons for being present at the time. Could you, Yorke, imagine for a moment that I was the profligate he described ?”

I shook my head, and he asked again,—

“And do you exonerate me from blame for being so despicable as to intend marrying the woman who had plotted against me, rather than give you the benefit of my inheritance ? It was very hard lines on me, Yorke. I had plenty of debts, and my estate would have been encumbered. Ought I to have submitted to such an injustice ? Do you think it was unmanly to get the will into my own hands before marrying Jane, and by doing so to make my own bondage voluntary ?”

“I do not judge you at all, uncle. You were placed in very peculiar circumstances, and were the victim of a flagrant act of in-

justice. The temptation to be even with the woman who had schemed for your entanglement must have been very strong. I do not say you were justified in adopting the means you did, but I can sympathise with the action, as being the natural outcome of excessive vexation. The wrong was pressing sorely upon you, and the knowledge of it warped your better judgment. I think you were very unfairly treated."

"And I thought it was all done for petty spite, Yorke; but I now see that Jane Earl had a stronger motive—it was the last desperate effort of a dishonoured woman to retrieve her position. Oh, Yorke! These first beginnings of evil, what will they not lead up to? Poor Jane! Poor, unfortunate Jane! But I am glad, Yorke, very glad, that you know all. If I ever wronged you in thought, word, or deed, you forgive me; and I have made atonement, Yorke. You have been as a son to me."

"Ample atonement, uncle, if it were needed. But you did me no wrong, as you intended to comply with the conditions of that stupid will."

"Yes! But you will not doubt, Yorke, that I have been personally interested in you, when I acknowledge that this circumstance has influenced me—I have felt that you must be the heir of Dalrymple; and though many people have regarded you only as heir-presumptive, I have been determined that no act of mine should dispossess you of Dalrymple. Even Nina might have been regarded differently if she had come to me years ago."

"That latter possibility I will not believe, uncle. Perhaps you have become rather morbid on the subject of my inheritance, and having no temptation to set me on one side, you have made me an imaginary obstacle to matrimony; but I believe we should have both had too much good sense not to have acknowledged the necessity for overcoming all

fanciful difficulties, if Mrs Dalrymple had been able to make you happy years ago. I wish she had, with all my heart. Perhaps you might now have been different—better in health of mind and body.”

“My dear boy, it is best as it is! You were always unselfish; but I can assure you Nina has found her place now; and years ago, in my pride, I might have found her companionship less acceptable. I enjoyed my gay bachelorhood, Yorke! And, take it for all in all, your company is more to me than that of any woman. Nina is incomparable; but a man who has lived without feminine help for many years, might have found it irksome, if sickness did not render him dependent upon her gentle service. But Nina is the one love of my life for all that.”





CHAPTER IV.

THE BUBBLE REPUTATION.

“**D**O you know that some of our Dalrymple people still indulge themselves in idle speculations about the murder of Miss Earl?”

A few days had elapsed since we had before discussed the subject. I had thought it best to let it rest, and give my uncle breathing time before making the proposal which I had at heart, and which I precluded with this remark.

“Do they, Yorke?” he replied. “One would think they had enough to do with their ploughing and planting—the agricultural intellect is not generally expansive.”

"No!" I said. "And that is why it applies itself to a subject when once started upon it, with a tenacity that declines to leave it unmastered. An event, like Miss Earl's murder, takes the neighbourhood by storm, and compels interest by its suddenness and horror—it strikes terror to the heart of society; residents in lonely places have visions of possible murders in the future, and it becomes everybody's business to clear society of that terrible scourge—a murderer at large, upon the face of the globe; besides, people feel insulted by the idea that crime has happened in their midst; they hate to hear their native place spoken of in connection with it; they imagine strangers repeating 'Dalrymple? Where have I heard that name? Oh, I recollect; there was a terrible murder committed there some years ago.' People do not like such a stigma attaching to their favourite spot of earth."

"I think your notion far-fetched, Yorke;

these country boors are less sensitive, and reason less than you imagine."

"I might have thought so too, once; but I have found, on closer acquaintance with them, that the murder is constantly in their minds; they like to imagine they have a clue; and failing the right one, they have gone upon a wrong tack altogether. I want to disabuse their minds of a fallacy that gives me some pain."

"What is it, Yorke?"

"I am afraid, uncle, you will resent the conclusion they have come to about it; they are only too ready to judge the innocent. How can I tell you that some of them have the baseness to suspect their own landlord? You see your protracted absence set them thinking. I hope you are not very much hurt about it, uncle?"

"You must imagine me to be more obtuse than I am, Yorke, if you think I have not detected this treason. It does not trouble me; why should it you? All

the gentry round Dalrymple are on my side. What does it matter what a lot of ignorant boors say or think of you?"

"It matters very much when those same boors are your tenants; there ought to be a pleasant relationship between them and their landlord—a good feeling on both sides; they have interests in common, as the prosperity of each is in a great measure dependent upon the other—the wealthier the tenant the better he farms, and *vice versâ*; and so the property increases or depreciates in value. I cannot see that the advantage is all with the proprietor, and that he can afford to look down from his height upon the tenants and think their feelings and sentiments to be of no consequence. And I cannot bear to think that people are bringing grist to our mill, and harbouring meanwhile a base suspicion of us. Uncle, will you let me publish some statement which will clear you before all the world? I would give a summary of Edward Ormonde's

confession; of his previous connection with his cousin; his early delinquencies; his banishment from the country; his return, and his villainous treatment of Miss Earl, culminating in her murder. Upon this point I would enlarge and describe his entrance, by the slightly opened window, and his cold-blooded passage from the coffin of the dead to the chamber of his victim. I would tell of his second flight to America, and subsequent return to England to die."

"Yorke," interrupted my uncle, "you would do for a penny-a-liner. But I see no sense in all this."

"If no sense, there is at least no harm. Let it be so, uncle! You will stand better in the county for this vindication,"

"I need none," replied my uncle proudly; "but have your will, Yorke; it can only, as you say, be harmless."

"I was too well contented to argue the matter, and applied to Mr Hawley, as once before, for assistance. I felt that he would

be as rejoiced as anybody to know that the murderer had declared himself; and I suggested that, if he would kindly write a letter to the local papers, embodying the facts which I laid before him, it might have more weight than any direct communication from those more interested in the subject.

In those days a clergyman's authority in a country place was supreme; his wisdom was regarded as superior, and his assertions were acknowledged to be indisputable. That day has passed—I am now becoming an old man, and the age is still advancing with rapid strides. And though some of the clergy may look back upon the earlier as the good old times, many of them are satisfied to have lost the prestige of their profession in the general increase of knowledge and progress of ideas amongst all classes.

However, good Mr Hawley's letter created no little excitement at Dalrymple, and as no one dreamed of doubting the veracity of

its statement, my uncle became the most popular man of the district. And I made an effort to bring him there once again.

"Mrs Dalrymple," I said one day in his presence, "would you not like to get out of this stifling atmosphere? You, who have been used to the clear skies of Italy, must find London very disagreeable."

"I do not like your English air, Mr Maxwell, but if my husband chooses we will yet live here."

"But you have never seen the country; even in England, at this time of the year, the country is pleasant; everything is fresh, and green, and full of promise. At Dalrymple, it will be looking quite beautiful now, although it is by no means situated amongst the finest of scenery."

"Ah, Dalrymple," she said softly, "that must be nice—the home of all your people. How much I should like to see Dalrymple!" she sighed; and continued. "Your English towns are so dreary, so monotonous, not what you call picturesque, not ancient

and sacred, as are our Italian towns—there is an odour of sanctity about all our beautiful Italy. I miss it much, Mr Maxwell. But Dalrymple—that would be to me much the same—the place where the good old family have lived for the generations.”

“You shall see it, Nina,” said my uncle. “Any wish of yours I am pleased to gratify—it is little that I have time to do for you now.”

“Not if you wish it not, Osmyth. I am with you content, perfectly ; but if you would also like, there is nothing would give me so much of pleasure.”

“We will go there, Nina. There is no reason now why Dalrymple should frighten me. Yorke, you are a born diplomatist ; we shall see you yet—at least those that live will see you a leading politician.” He laughed and made fun of my diplomacy, but he added, “I am not altogether displeased to revisit the home of my boyhood, and I want to see Maude, Yorke.”

"She is there now, uncle, and is expecting me to join her."

"Well, then, there is a double reason for our journey northwards; Nina wishes it, and I can ill afford to part with you again, Yorke, even for a short time. So we will make our arrangements, Nina, and leave this miserable London, which you hate."

"My beloved, I have not said it—I cannot hate what you love. England has been to me always a word of sweetness. And I love all the places which we together live in. But it is not the England of which I have dreamed; it is too much damp and cold; and the sun, it never shines so lovely as in our beautiful Italy. But Dalrymple! it is written on my heart, the same as the town of the great queen, only that she lost that; and I have yet to find the fair Dalrymple, where my husband was once the little boy."

"Do not be disappointed, Nina! Dal-

rymple is a second London, dreary and uninteresting."

"Ah, but not so much the smoke," said Mrs Dalrymple, with her sweet smile. "And there are the good reasons for Nina to love the dear Dalrymple."

What a different reception was given to us now, than on the first occasion, when my uncle and I visited Dalrymple together. Public opinion had changed, and in the proportion that it had previously maligned, it delighted to honour my uncle.

Popularity has an uncertain existence, and, in some respects, a ridiculous one. It is founded too much on sentiment to be either very discriminating or permanent. We see a man the idol of the people for a time; the great majority of the population delight to honour him, to magnify his excellence, and all but fall down to worship him.

And why? Sometimes because of certain achievements; or, at others, even

for particular occurrences which have happened under his organisation, but which might, most likely, have been brought to pass as well by some other man. They bow down to the man in gratitude for a satisfactory issue; but it is not he, personally, that is the cause of their fervour.

The pride of any community in a hero proceeds, partly, from that innate, religious instinct which, in any exalted state of feeling, must seek an object to worship. But when the excitement of the day is past, the man falls back to his original place amongst his fellows, and his faults are noticed more critically than his virtues.

In some degree, this was the case with the people of Dalrymple. A generous desire to atone for a secret injustice prompted their hero worship. To soothe their own consciences, they exalted Mr Dalrymple to the altar of fame; but my uncle was the same man who had visited

them unhonoured the previous year ; that he had lost much of his fine presence and attractive manner through sickness was the only essential difference.

For all that, he was now welcomed warmly—cheered vociferously. The whole parish turned out at the hour when it was known we were to arrive ; nothing would satisfy them but to withdraw the horses from the carriage and replace them by men, who, with willing hands, dragged it along, while the rest still gazed at its occupants and saluted them. There was some display of bunting, and several arches of evergreen, with appropriate words of welcome, had been erected ; one at the rectory gate with “Long life to Mr and Mrs Dalrymple. Welcome home,” seemed to touch my uncle’s feelings. The whole affair, unexpected as it had been, was almost more than he could bear, and he did not respond very energetically to the welcome. He kept his hat off, however, and Nina,

with the enthusiasm and natural grace of a foreigner, bowed constantly, her face quite radiant with delight. I enjoyed it all quietly, as an evidence of the complete withdrawal of those suspicions about my uncle which had pained me.

It was somewhat of a relief to all when we were within the walls of old Dalrymple Hall, and the mob had dispersed. But our reception was not without its influence on us even there. The place seemed less dull, less formal, more homelike, as if its atmosphere had been relieved of some cold mist which had till then hung over it.

Even my uncle said, "This is something like coming home!" with a satisfied smile, and Mrs Dalrymple was rapturous.

"These dear people who have received us with so much kindness, they are almost like those of my own country. They adore you, my beloved; they make

much of you. Why have you so long been away from these dear people ; and this, what you call, old-fashioned home ? I like it—this, Dalrymple, that you have too little loved. It is ancient and nice ; not stately as our Italian palazzos, but still good. And the people ! Ah ! they have the hearts, as have our brave Italians.”

“I am glad you like it Mrs Dalrymple,” I said, “and that you are interested in our sturdy countrymen. They are not always so enthusiastic—they are a little cold in manner, as a rule, but true-hearted and genuine. It has been an unusual day with them, but you must not think, if in other occasions they are different, that they do not feel. You must always remember your welcome of to-day.”

“I know,” replied Mrs Dalrymple. “I shall not expect the same. The English are grave and silent, but a great people—a nation so rich and clever. I much

love the English. Is not my husband the largest of all men English to me?"

I laughed, and said,—

"You mean that he is the best and noblest in your eyes, but surely not the largest?"

"Ah, well, your English words mean so different; but you and I are in agreement, Mr Yorke. Is he not a grand and excellent gentleman?"

I always liked to encourage Mrs Dalrymple to talk; her accent was so foreign, her voice so soft and liquid, her manner so ingratiating, and, above all, her face was so angelic, that I was glad to have an opportunity of gazing upon it without being unpolite; of admiring it without exciting her suspicion that I was doing so. It was part of her charm that she was quite unconscious of her sweetness and power of attraction.

In this return home I felt more than ordinary relief. There was no mystery now left for me to unravel. I had a

restful consciousness that evil had departed from the house ; that the veil was withdrawn from my eyes ; and that, consequently, my peace by day and night would no longer be disturbed by uncanny imaginations. I opined that the ghostly visitor of the west wing had departed for ever, but I did not care to put this to the test. That side of the house had become particularly distasteful to me ; and I negatived Mrs Mayne's proposition that my uncle should occupy the master's room.

"No, Mrs Mayne ! If my uncle should wish it, I will still persuade him, what I am well assured of, that a room with a southern aspect is better for an invalid."

"That is true, sir," replied Mrs Mayne. "The rooms are all in order, because I was uncertain which you would select. The rooms to the front, which were occupied by the late Mrs Dalrymple, face south. The morning room of the last mistress is very pleasant ; but the upholstery is a little faded. Do you think that

the new lady would like those rooms, sir? She seems to be a sweet lady, Mr Yorke, if I may make so bold as to say it."

"Of course you may, Mrs Mayne, and I thoroughly agree with you; and, as my uncle is quite tired, and Mrs Dalrymple a stranger, I would suggest that you make this arrangement for the present, and afterwards, any change which they both wish can be made."

"All right, Mr Yorke; the rooms are all well fired, and I will give directions for the luggage to be placed there. And you, Mr Yorke, where would you choose to be?"

"Anywhere, Mrs Mayne," I answered carelessly; "but not too far off my uncle's room."

"You will perhaps like the small chintz room adjoining, Mr Yorke?"

"Yes, yes! that will do excellently well. Anywhere, Mrs Mayne."

"No, sir, not anywhere, if I have a say in the matter. That chintz room is just

the warmest, most cheerful spot in the whole house."

"You are too considerate for me, Mrs Mayne," I said, to please her.

"Mr Yorke, you were almost a baby when you first came here; and it is likely that I should take an interest in you, though you have grown into a real fine gentleman; but you are not so proud as to mind the old housekeeper, as the way of some is. This is a proud day for me, sir, to see the family back again, and have a lady so sweet to serve, as I am sure Mrs Dalrymple is."

Old Mrs Mayne would have gone on chattering longer had I allowed her. The tears were in her eyes, and she seemed very full of importance and emotion. She had sought my advice about the rooms, and we had this little parley together in the hall, while Mr and Mrs Dalrymple were resting before going upstairs.





CHAPTER V.

THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

ON the following day the rector and Mrs Hawley were our first callers. Then Mr Rivers and Adèle, but not Maude, though she was staying with them.

Adèle declared "That Maude had a sudden attack of shyness, which developed itself into a headache, and that all their persuasions and assurances that the air would do her good had been useless. And I must congratulate you, I suppose, Mr Maxwell," she added, "on your engagement. It was very sudden, and surprised us all. But I hope you will be very happy."

She said this with that insinuating softness which conveys the speaker's idea that she has some especial right to be sympathetic, and that her wish must, of itself, have some peculiar influence over her hearer. It expressed contrition, compassion and encouragement, as though she said, "I behaved badly; you cannot forget me, and I am very sorry for you; but perhaps after all you will be happier than you expect."

Adèle was too conceited to imagine that another woman could efface her own image from any man's mind; and, to the end of her life, she would regard all her old lovers as being still under her spell; she would sigh contentedly when she was fat, old and wrinkled at the remembrance, and soliloquise, "Poor fellow! What a pity that he ever loved me!"


She had been sensible enough to perceive that I should never marry her, after discovering her manœuvres towards my uncle; and she consoled herself straightway with

her faithful, patient, admiring swain ; but, as soon as she had recovered from her chagrin, her vanity re-asserted itself, and suggested the possibility of my life-long devotion.

I have ever since been a favourite with the fair Adèle, and she has gladly received any attentions which civility has prompted me to render her. The reason is obvious—she rejoiced, like the ancient victor, who dragged his victims at the wheels of his chariot.

We had many callers that day ; and it was quite evening before I had time for my darling Maude. I felt compelled to help Mr and Mrs Dalrymple to receive, because my uncle was so unwell, and Mrs Dalrymple so unused to doing the honours.

The whole neighbourhood called during this and the next day—that is to say, the section of it which represented society. There might have been some curiosity to see the new wife. Some may have come with the inclination to disparage ; some to criticise ; more from goodness of heart ;



but none knew of Nina's real history. She was nervous, and afraid they would be supercilious; but I reminded her of her husband, and begged her to be composed and dignified, to justify his choice. I told her that they knew nothing more than that she was Italian, who Mr Dalrymple had known in his younger days.

But I knew they were suspicious of her—that they imagined she was something peculiar—that the marriage was something more than an ordinary *mésalliance*. But my remarks had a good effect upon Nina; she behaved admirably. In some instances when the guests were determined to draw her out, and there were unpleasant inferences made, Nina did not comprehend their English phraseology, and therefore her composure and gracious bearing had every appearance of that good breeding which declines to accept an indignity from a guest.

The first day was well over when I sauntered out to see Maude. She was in

the drawing-room with Adèle and Mr Rivers, and I fancied that her coldness was owing to their presence. It was a very unsatisfactory meeting. I could only take her hand fondly and make my eyes express the joy of my heart. In this I could not help myself; for, though she perversely declined to meet my glances, I was constantly looking at her sweet face, and she was conscious, as her flushed cheeks betrayed, of their fervour when my love welled up within me and warmed those glances.

I apologised to Adèle for my late visit, but she said, "That was of no consequence; I had been expected; but it was better late than not at all."

She looked at Maude, and I inferred from her words that there had been some idea that I was a laggard in love. "Maude, however, is not exacting," she added.

Maude blushed, but she was not well pleased with the remark, and she was feeling a little aggrieved, I saw, that I

had given cause for such comments. I explained that my numerous occupations had prevented an earlier visit; but I did not attempt to make them understand my reason for helping Mrs Dalrymple to receive, so that it sounded a lame apology even to myself.

I thought Maude was looking well, notwithstanding the headache; she certainly was prettier than I had ever seen her, dressed in pale blue, with a profusion of lace ruffles and a bunch of late northern primroses fastened near her neck by a brooch—a flush was on her cheeks, and her countenance was rather subdued; but she looked very sweet and dainty, and I longed to tell her so—to caress her, and awake that piquancy of expression which I knew so well.

Above all, I desired to hold her again to my heart, and take a long lingering look into the depths of her loving eyes, and so to assure myself that her coldness was assumed.

I could see that Mr Rivers was fidgety—that he read my wishes, and would like to have left us together; but, with the awkwardness that is natural to man, he failed to suggest a graceful *modus operandi*. He looked helplessly at Adèle, who was quite obtuse.

In the meantime Maude rose and went quietly from the room. I was in time to hold the door open, and I whispered,—

“Maude, why will you not look at me? Shall I come with you?”

She shook her head, but did not look up as she answered,—

“No, not for the world!”

I felt very sad and crestfallen, but determined to pretend that all was satisfactory. I hastily entered into a conversation with Adèle about the places she had seen abroad during her honeymoon; and, when Maude returned, we were having quite a lively discussion.

I noticed that her face was changed—the flush had gone, and her eyes no longer

avoided mine; they looked so mournfully at me that I almost broke off my conversation abruptly, to ask the meaning of this sadness. But Mr Rivers went to sit by her side, as if to reproach me for some neglect, and I was bitterly conscious that a misunderstanding was beginning amongst us; but I could not, with Mr Rivers sitting there, go and say, "What is it?" and whisper loving words of anxiety.

So I sat still, and talked to Adèle, feeling very miserable. I remembered Tom and Helen—they had preceded us to Dalrymple, and were at present lodging in the place, while looking out for a house. I asked Mrs Rivers if she had seen them.

"No," she said. "Not unless the strangers at church last Sunday were they. Is she a tall, refined-looking person, and her husband a handsome, good-tempered looking man? He stared at me incessantly, which was not very good manners," laughed Adèle; "but that attracted my notice."

"Trust a lady for discovering a good-looking man, Rivers," I said, anxious to draw him and Maude into the conversation. "Yes, Mrs Rivers, those are my friends. And if you will call upon them, and show them a little attention, you will find Mrs Chance very nice, and her husband, which is more to the point with the ladies, quite irresistible."

"I shall make a point of calling, to please you, as well as my myself," replied Adèle softly, with the significant show of interest which I have before mentioned.

It was quite late, and I rose to go, but I persistently held my darling's hand, while I made sundry remarks to her brother—it was all the pleasure that was left to me.

"Maude," I said at last, "when will you see me alone? What time to-morrow may I come and take you to see my uncle? Or shall he call on you? He is very ailing; or I should not ask you to come, Maude," I said pleadingly.

She lifted her eyes to mine with an effort as she said, without the ghost of a smile or any other expression, except that of intense weariness,—

“I cannot make any arrangements to-night.”

She treated my wishes with such disregard, while others were listening and drawing their own inferences from her manner, that I had some excuse for feeling hurt and angry. I let her hand drop at once, but I relented and asked,—

“Are you in pain, Maude? Does your head ache so badly that you cannot think or talk, or even look at me naturally?”

A little shiver seemed to go through her.

“I am not well,” she replied coldly.

“Good-night then, Maude,” I said sadly, but with some pride.

“Good-night,” she echoed faintly.

I looked round once more when I reached the door, thinking that Maude might vouch-

safe me a parting look, but her eyes were busy with the pattern of the carpet.

"You are a funny pair of lovers," I heard Adèle say, with her silvery, mocking voice. It jarred upon me—the words and the voice alike.

Mr Rivers too seemed constrained, when he was seeing me out.

"I hope your sister will be better to-morrow," I said; "you must be wondering at her manner, I am sure. She has disappointed me very much to-night, Mr Rivers."

I was so downhearted that I could not help seeking his sympathy; he might explain it all, as he understood Maude better than I did. Shall I confess that my voice was a little unsteady, as I talked to the brother of my love? I fear it was so; but he was very good-natured, and did not let me see that he noticed it; his own manner changed, and he became almost brotherly as he said,—

"It will be all right by-and-by, Mr

Maxwell. I confess Maude is an enigma just now. I never saw a girl so changed. She used to be a regular madcap—the brightest, merriest girl living; but I am afraid that the governing work has spoiled her.”

“I was thinking that I might be the culprit,” I said; “fearing lest I had in some manner offended Maude. I need hardly tell you that, if I am so unfortunate, it has been quite unintentional. I love your sister, Mr Rivers; but I can scarcely believe that she reciprocates my feelings after to-night.”

“I thought she did,” he replied, with a puzzled air. “She wrote to me in that strain. But she is so young, only twenty, and if she has mistaken her own feelings it is perhaps excusable. I am very sorry, Mr Maxwell, but we must not come to a rapid conclusion. Come across to-morrow, and I will see that she gives you the opportunity for an explanation. But I would not think of it nor vex myself

with misgivings, which may after all be very uncalled for. Let the matter rest until to-morrow."

I thanked him for his advice and went home. I was glad to find that my uncle had gone to his room, as his questions might have been trying under the circumstances. I walked about and recalled the events of the evening.

"Little darling," I said to myself, "how sweet she looked; like a rare exotic plant besides that blooming rose, Adèle, who is too full blown and hardy to be affected by circumstances, emotions, feelings, fancies, and to change a thousand times, and be charming in each new phase, as my darling is. Oh, my sweet Maude, what is there amiss between us now? She wore primroses too!" I said tenderly. "I wonder if she thought of those I gathered for her at Rokeby, when she fastened them in her dress so daintily. My little love, my precious one, what has changed you so much since we parted at Rokeby?"

I mused moodily for an hour or more. "Did she regret her acceptance of me? Had she found out that she did not love me, that she had yielded only to my importunities? Had she seen some one else?"

I recollected my uncle's prophecies respecting the squally weather which might happen to me, with some consolation; but it was impossible to rid myself of all my doubts and fears.

The more I thought about it, and the more insupportable was my disappointment and uneasiness. I tried to convince myself that Maude was jealous, and could not. And though I said, "If the worst comes, I can only begin my wooing afresh; and keeping a stout heart within me, be determined to persevere and pursue my object till it is attained," yet I could not shake off my despondency.

So I went to bed with it, thinking sadly, but with the deepest love of my little Maude. I imagined that weary, tired face resting upon her pillow in tran-

quilt repose. I kissed in fancy the tumbled hair which lay across the pillow, and the natural waviness of those locks were a serious obstacle to my caressing fingers as I became more and more drowsy, and finally lost my vision in sleep.





CHAPTER VI.

STRANGERS YET.

“**M**AUDE, I will not believe you !
I cannot think that you have
deceived me all this time, and
only pretended to love me ? No, Maude,
you are mine ! You must be mine !”

And I clasped her passionately in my
arms.

This was not my night vision but my
waking reality. But Maude withdrew her-
self from my arms as soon as I relaxed
my hold, with the intention of further
questioning her.

“It is the last time,” she said solemnly ;
“you must not do so again !”

“Then you have deceived me after all ;

you, Maude, whom I thought so true and so good! I could not have believed it if an angel had suggested such a thing," I said angrily. "How have I deserved this treatment?"

"You have done nothing," Maude replied faintly. "Mine is all the blame, but I was mistaken."

"Don't you think it is a little late for repentance, Miss Rivers, when we have been engaged for weeks, and you have allowed me to think during all that time that you loved me? Fool that I was!" I said bitterly. "I will not release you from your promise. If I were to offer you your freedom it would be deemed an unmanly action, dishonourable conduct, to say nothing of a heartless desertion; and in what other way can your own conduct be judged, Miss Rivers? Why should I submit to be taken up and be cast off like a half-worn glove? I hold you to your promise, Maude?"

"Do you think you could keep my love,

in that case?" said Maude, with flashing eyes. "That, at any rate, is my own free gift if my hand is not."

"Maude! Maude!" I said sorrowfully, "why have you deceived me?"

"I did not!" she replied impetuously. "I was mistaken—I thought you could make me happy; that I could trust your love."

"And you cannot, Maude?" I interrupted. "And all your assurances that you would never doubt me, but be faithful and trusting, are these to go for nothing? Why did I ever see you, child? For you are a child—to play with a man's heart as if it were a toy!"

"You are very unkind," she replied tearfully. "I did not mean to, but somehow, since I have been here, I have found all my uncertainty about your steadfastness returning. It has not been so very easy for me to come to the conclusion that we must part, that you should taunt me with suspicions of my truth."

“ Well, Maude,” I said more softly, “ if you will say, in so many words, that you do not love, that you never have loved, nor can love me ; and that you have found all this out recently, upon second thoughts—third, fourth, or fifth thoughts, whatever you may call them, after our engagement of weeks—if you say this, I will release you ; I will even forgive you ; and come to the conclusion that you were too young to know your own mind, and that I have some right to regard your nature as unstable, whatever you may think of mine.”

“ I have not said that,” said Maude. “ I will not own it ; but if I have found that I cannot enjoy the happiness and peace with you which I covet, after my short but too troublesome life, to have hitherto given me that ease of circumstance which prevents people knowing their own minds, from childish thoughtlessness—if I have found that a torturing sense of insecurity, a doubt of the one who should be trusted,

above all others, prevents me fulfilling my engagement, why should I sacrifice myself for the sake of honour, and make us both miserable for life?"

"I want no sacrifice, Maude," I said very gravely; "and it has been, and is, very far out of my intentions to make you miserable."

"But it would. What is love without trust, respect, reliance?" she replied.

"Nothing, Maude! You are right. If you cannot feel all this for me, we must part."

"Yes, we must part!" she echoed, weeping hysterically.

I did not attempt to soothe her nor caress her. I held aloof—my feelings were cut to the quick.

"But first, Maude, let me assure you that my affection for you is founded on a rock—that I have no thought for any other woman; and that you have broken my heart."

"No, not that!" she said plaintively;

"I could not do that—if I thought—your heart was—broken I would rather—I would do anything rather than grieve you. But you will get over it. There are plenty of nicer girls than I am. And you are so easily pleased—so changeable."

"No, Maude," I said sternly, "I am not changeable; I am no weathercock; it would be better for me if I were, so it seems. But, Maude, though I have understood you to mean that you have an objection to breaking my heart, I will not have you sacrifice yourself for me. A man has to bear such a thing stoically; and I do not suppose that there will be any visible difference in me from this day forth; but there will be a void within—a soreness of heart—which will not help me to pass through life bravely. Maude, you do not know what you are doing!" I said in a despairing tone. "But you shall have your will, at any cost to me."

It was quite true that she was guiltless of any intentional heartlessness; in the

selfishness of youth, she could see only her own suffering—she did not think of mine—did not believe in it, fancied she was inflicting but a trifling wound, and that, as I had got over my fancy for Adèle, I should as easily forget herself—she, whom I had adored—my promised wife, with whom I had grown into the habit of associating all my future life. It was a cruel blow, and not the least of my pain was that I had found a flaw in the jewel which I had so dearly prized.

Maude looked very sad, very troubled, almost sympathetic, but withal resolute. I did not again attempt to alter her purpose.

“I think you will at least promise me one thing, Maude,” I said; “that you will not avoid me in the future; that we shall still meet as friends. It is very little to ask from the man you have deprived of so much. You owe me every consolation in your power to give, and what I ask of you is this—do not withdraw yourself from society on my

account, and do not go away from Dalrymple sooner than you would have done under more pleasant circumstances. If you stay here we are compelled to meet, unless you lead the life of a hermit; but that must not concern you—my presence need never discomfort you. I shall not reproach you, even in manner. What I desire is, that we should meet naturally; that I can speak to you and see you, without the pain of fancying that you avoid me. It is the wisest plan, if you wish to escape the notice and comments of the world. And, Maude," I said in a low tone, "it will comfort me. Will you do this?"

"Yes!" she replied, humbly and tremulously, "I will do anything you wish."

"You will tell your brother, then, that we have agreed to part," I said, still lingering near her. "But if Mr and Mrs Dalrymple invite you, as they will, with your brother and Mrs Rivers, you will come even there?" I asked.

She bowed her head, and I could see that she controlled her emotion with a great effort. I fancied there was some latent tenderness in her eye, and I took her hand gently once again.

"Are you sure, Maude, that this is best—for your happiness? do not think of me," I asked.

"I think so," she said sadly.

So I left her, and went out into the brightness and warmth of the sunny May-day with a chill at my heart. It was the first of May, and the very horses in the cart seemed jubilant, as they proudly tossed their heads, which had been decorated by hands belonging to some one who could joyously welcome the happy morn. I felt myself envying the drivers, as they whistled beside their laden waggons. I, alone, was oppressed with care and pain, when all the world was full of hope and gladness, unless Maude too suffered; and I thought she did.

Poor Maude! so mistaken in her esti-

mate of me. And so impetuous and hasty about this and everything. Would she regret? Would she be sorry for me? Would she, now that all was over between us, begin to doubt whether it were well for us both?

Of course I was obliged to tell my uncle about it. He said very little; but that little was all sympathy, and he very kindly forbore to blame Maude.

"She is a silly little thing!" he said. "But cheer up, Yorke, she will change her mind again; and when he does, you must make short work of the wooing, and marry this perverse young lady at once. You may depend upon it, she is chewing the cud of bitter reflection already in that unsatisfactory state of mind, when her own accomplished will is painful, when her late lover's virtues are in the ascendant, and his failings absolutely invisible. Poor little girl! It was the wisest arrangement to part for a while; it will settle her mind and cure her of jealousy in the future."

“I do not think she was exactly jealous,” I said. “I have never given her any cause for it.”

“Perhaps not, but I fancy she is one of those whose imagination distresses them unnecessarily, and Madame Adèle is very insinuating, Yorke—there is always mischief where two women come together who have, or have had, an interest in the same man, and it is always the worst for the one in possession—she is apt to behold her former rival with prejudiced eyes; and when it comes to actual intercourse between the lover and his quondam mistress, the demon jealousy still further obstructs the vision of the afflicted pair. It is a *bona fide* case of jealousy, and if Maude has not behaved very prettily, I do not wonder at it; for of all the torturing passions that afflict humanity, jealousy is the worst to bear, and therefore the most unjust and tyrannical in its results.

I saw Maude at church on the following Sunday, and when Adèle stopped to speak

to me, as we came out, Maude was obliged to speak also. She blushed a good deal when our hands met, but I took care that my clasp should not be different to that of an ordinary acquaintance. I was quite natural in my manner, and asked her, "If the headache she had suffered from when last I saw her had gone?" in the most matter-of-fact way.

It was a stupid question, but the truth was that I could not think of anything else to say, and I was determined to be friendly and put her at ease. She was the more confused of the two, and the vigilant eye of Adèle was upon us—the latter was quite willing to converse longer, but I luckily espied my friend Chance and his wife.

"Excuse me, Mrs Rivers," I said, raising my hat rather abruptly to both ladies.

I joined the new doctor and Mrs Chance ; they were creating a little sensation in the congregation, as it was now known who they were, and when I was seen walking with

them towards the Hall, every one surmised that they were going there to luncheon, and were our friends; and society made up its important mind on the spot that it would be the correct thing to call on Mrs Chance.

We were in for a round of gaieties now. Dalrymple was in a state of excitement about the reception of two brides—both strangers, and therefore objects of peculiar interest in this quiet neighbourhood, where matches were oftener made up between the various resident families, and benedict and his bride afterwards settled down in the accustomed manner, and in the same places which had known them from childhood.

About the third bride, Adèle Rivers, there was then no novelty, no curiosity, and she faded into insignificance, beautiful and pleasing as she was in comparison with the foreign Mrs Dalrymple, and that sweet, patient-looking Madonna, whom the dashing young doctor had wooed and won.

We went out wherever we were asked; even my uncle roused himself out of his languor in the evenings, and seemed to enjoy the sociability of his neighbours.

We met the same people over and over again, so constantly that we became too familiar to leave room for stiffness, and Mrs Dalrymple and Helen Chance were consequently quite at home amongst the new circle of friends. Stately visiting would have made them both uncomfortable, but all was cordiality; and the brides looked charming in their respective styles, and had a great deal of attention from the men—they were not in disfavour with the ladies, and that is perhaps about all that could be expected upon the introduction of stranger ladies, whose presence, from its attractiveness and novelty, must necessarily eclipse their own.

Maude and I were thus constantly thrown together, and, I believe, if it had not been for this, my state of mind would have been pitiful. The excitement of

looking forward to these meetings, and wondering how she would act, and what overtures I dare make, kept me from being entirely depressed.

And then when we met, what a pleasure it was to be near her—to touch her hand, even in careless greeting. I took care to avoid Adèle, out of regard to my uncle's judgment. Mrs Chance appeared to me to be a safer recipient of my attentions, and she and Maude seemed to suit each other. Mrs Chance was then often in Maude's neighbourhood, and I could address myself to the former, and take pleasure in knowing that Maude was so near, that she heard all the conversation. Sometimes Mrs Chance endeavoured to make her a sharer in it, but not often successfully.

I consoled myself by the reflection that I could not be utterly objectionable to the lady of my affections, or she would have left her seat at such times, instead of sitting quietly there unnoticed by the

other occupants of the crowded room—for no one endeavoured to frustrate my efforts to amuse the two ladies.

I seemed to shield Maude effectually from observation, as with one accord the men left the coast clear for me. They had heard a rumour of our former relationship to each other, and seemed to fancy I had some right to appropriate her still. The wonder was that Maude herself did not resent this kind of mounting guard over her.

But this could not last for a whole evening, and Maude and I mingled with the company, separately, for a considerable portion of each night. I do not suppose she was conscious of my *espionage*, but I can safely say that scarcely a look or movement of hers was unnoticed by me. I was glad when the cloud which rested on her face lightened, when, in the full enjoyment of social intercourse, she became once again the bright, vivacious girl whom I had at first known and loved.

It is next to an impossibility for a young and naturally lively person to preserve a sober demeanour when all is mirth around, and Maude's gravity invariably relaxed before long, and her laughter, when I caught the sound of it, was very pleasant to one pair of listening ears.

My uncle usually claimed a good deal of her notice; he was determined to establish a pleasant understanding between them, though his nephew was left out in the cold. He began by desiring to understand "the girl whom Yorke was so infatuated about," and ended by liking her immensely on his own account. She amused him, and was very sweet and deferential, and altogether at her best then; but I could not help envying him of those kind looks of hers, little thinking that Maude was lavishing upon him some of the love which she felt for my unfortunate self—giving vent to her stifled affection, her unexpressed pity and regret in these pretty attentions to my uncle. It was

as *my* uncle she regarded him — so she told me later on.

Probably Helen Chance detected my partiality for Maude — women are always lynx-eyed when a love affair is on hand — but I had never told my friends the name of my *fiancée*. I believe Tom may have heard it mentioned in the neighbourhood ; but, anyway, Helen Chance's company was so agreeable to me, because she talked of Maude, and declared, "That none of her new acquaintances were so nice, so really charming as Maude Rivers."

The topic was never disagreeable to me ; never stale, flat, and unprofitable. Maude's praises were as the sweetest of music to my loving ears — like oil poured upon the troubled waters of my mind.

Lovers have felt the same before and since, and will do again to the end of time, so what is the use of excusing my own foolishness ? If foolish it was sweet, and there are not so many soft

places in our hearts that we must needs hide any out of sight.

One thing troubled me in visiting. It was that others did not acknowledge my darling's importance. As a penniless girl, a *ci devant* governess, and the sister of the curate, the society of Dalrmyple ignored her. People were pleasant enough to her, but she was made of no account, given an unimportant place at table, and surrendered to any one's charge who was not of sufficient consequence to be well paired.

There was Mrs Dalrymple preferred before her, whose history, had it been known to the world, would have caused those well-born and refined ladies to gather their skirts around them and leave her to solitude and shame.

There was Helen Chance, ranking as next chief guest, who, though not unchaste or unlovely in her character, had been the associate of a murderer, and had walked nearly all her life in the lowly

places of the earth — they did not know her story.

And there was Adèle Rivers, graciously received also, who was neither so clever, nor so good, nor so ladylike as my own still cherished love.

It so happened that I never had the good luck to walk down to dinner with Maude — no friendly hostess interfered in my behalf. This first provoked my ire. I did not like to see these ladies taking precedence of Maude, because I resented being placed myself amongst the dowagers and matrons.

I did not regret that the Italian peasant girl was installed with all honour at Dalrymple ; but when it came to a comparison with my own pure treasure, I found her wanting.

I noticed that though Maude played and sang better than any lady in the room, she was always asked to do so the last. These little trifles annoyed me, and I thought, "If Maude would only recon-

sider her decision and reverse it, the breach between us being healed and our engagement made public, we should see whether Miss Rivers was not worthy of a little more consideration from society."

At last all the gaieties were over, and though I tried to make them, there were fewer opportunities of meeting Maude. I heard that she was thinking of returning to Rokeby, but I knew *that* should never be till she had given me one more proof, from her own lips, of her indifference to me.

I was not proud in this way. It is a lady's privilege to refuse—a lover's wisest course to try again. Besides, she could only distress me—my dignity could not be offended by *her* obduracy, while I loved her so dearly.





CHAPTER VII.

RECONCILIATION.

MY uncle was about this time taken suddenly and alarmingly ill. He was attacked with syncope one day when we were dining, and remained unconscious so long that we were afraid he would never get over it. He did, however, but the attack must have weakened him, for the doctor was alarmed at his condition, and said that another as severe would be too much for him.

Consequently, we were very watchful of him, scarcely leaving his side. Nina was too frightened to be alone with him; but by degrees this fear wore off, as there was

no recurrence of the distressing symptoms. But his weakness increased, and this was evidently only the beginning of the end.

In anxiety for my uncle, I did not go much abroad now, and Maude was less frequently in my thoughts.

Two celebrated London men had been down to see our invalid, and had looked very grave as they finally admitted there was no hope that he would rally again. No wonder that Maude was half forgotten, while this impending calamity was weighing heavily on my heart.

My uncle still left his bed daily and came to the library—that room where I had first spoken of love to Maude, when I had been so presumptuous as to fancy I might win her favour, after a few days' acquaintanceship. My impulsive haste had injured my cause, for Maude had judged me to be an impressionable, foolish boy, ready to fall in love at any moment and any quantity of times.

My uncle, sitting quietly in his chair, would insist sometimes on seeing some of the numerous friends who called to make inquiries and sympathise with Mrs Dalrymple.

Mr Hawley saw him every day, and once, when Mr Rivers and Adèle were announced, he said,—

“Bring them in here, Yorke!”

Adèle was sorry to see him so changed, and seemed even affected when taking leave of him. He said, holding her hand,—

“This may be the last time I shall see you. Will you do me a favour?”

“Yes, Mr Dalrymple, a hundred if I knew how,” she said, the tears in her blue eyes.

“Send your little sister to say good-bye to me; she will not refuse when she knows I am dying. Send her, please, Adèle, to-night, for no one knows how soon.”

“Oh, Mr Dalrymple,” said Adèle, try-

ing to speak cheerily, "you must not get too low-spirited. Your friends know best, and you do not look so very ill. But I will send Maude," she said, looking at me deprecatingly, as though saying, "You will not mind if he wants it."

"Now be sure you keep cheerful, and get no dreadful ideas till I see you again, Mr Dalrymple. It is because you are weak that you give way to them."

Adèle said all this very kindly, but with her usual insincerity; for, as I handed her to the carriage, she said,—

"I am very sorry about Mr Dalrymple; he is sinking rapidly, I fear; he looks like death."

She gave a little shudder, and turned pale at the idea; but, while they were still within hearing, her light laugh was borne to me by the breeze that blew softly from the south.

Maude was coming, I thought. Yes, she would be sure to do so, after my uncle's message. She would be sorry;

she would be comforting and pitiful—too much so to try and delude my uncle with false hopes.

But even the prospect of seeing her did not give me joy. I stood at the hall door and looked around. The prospect was fair, the air balmy, the trees wore their fresh green foliage joyously as they seemed to dance to the light summer breeze; the flowers bloomed around in their sweet luxuriance; the birds chirped upon the boughs; the bees buzzed merrily among the roses; the faint lowing of the herds in their distant pastures sounded pleasantly; there was life and happiness and peace without, but within was decay and gloom.

It was in the twilight that Mr Rivers left his sister at the door, promising to fetch her again in an hour. Mrs Dalrymple met her and brought her in.

How thin and pale Maude had grown! How frail she looked as she came so noiselessly in, and laid her hand within

that of my uncle. He held it in his feeble grasp lightly enough, but she would not withdraw it till he released it.

“Dear Mr Dalrymple,” she said softly, “you are very ill, I fear. Adèle said you would like to see me, and I am very glad to come; but do not trouble to speak to me till you feel able. I will sit in this chair by you, and presently, perhaps, you will like to talk to me. I am used to sickness. May I put your pillow more comfortably behind your head?”

And without waiting for permission, she placed the cushion better, which had become disarranged, when he leaned forward to speak to her.

He was a little exhausted, and Maude sat down by him, and seeing me then, bowed in some confusion. Nina, from the other side of him, administered a little brandy in a spoon; and, obeying a sign from him, left the room.

Nothing was said for several moments after she had gone. I stood looking at Maude, and she gazed sorrowfully and compassionately upon my uncle. The clock ticked loudly, and the silence was almost painful. My uncle broke it.

“Maude—let me call you so, my dear—I am dying, but I think you could make my last days much happier if you would.”

Maude laid her hand gently on his arm as she said,—

“I would do anything in the world for you, dear Mr Dalrymple.”

He smiled at her affectionately.

“Stay with me, Maude—be as my own daughter. Help to nurse me and give me some of your faith in the home beyond. Tell me of those things which men value at a dying moment, if they never did before.”

“I do not like to refuse you,” she said, looking for a second shyly at me. “I will stay, Mr Dalrymple, and I will try to be a comfort to you.”

"You are!" he said. "It is pleasant to look at you. But there is one thing more, Maude, very near my heart—Yorke's happiness!"

Maude blushed and trembled, and I drew a step nearer, but restrained myself.

"It is in your hands. You can make or mar it. My child," he said earnestly, "do you know that he is the noblest, truest, most unselfish fellow that ever lived? Any woman might be honoured to be his choice."

"I do honour him," Maude said, almost in a whisper.

I went and stood beside her. I said,—

"Maude, I do not want honour, nothing but love and trust."

She still trembled; but my uncle took her hand and placed it in mine.

"I know you love him, Maude. Do not let any fatal mistake ruin his life and yours; be reconciled now! He deserves all your love, Maude, and I think you are

worthy of his, and that is saying very much, for the foolish fellow is ridiculously fond."

Maude kept her eyes upon the chair; but I put my arm round her waist, and turned her so that she faced me, as I asked her in a tender tone,—

"Shall it be so, Maude? Will you make me happy once again?" She did not speak, so I added, "Be quick, my dearest—say! For I am terribly anxious; will you trust me now and always, Maude?"

"Yes, Yorke," she said softly. I kissed her fondly; but she added, her face crimsoning at the remembrance of his presence;

"Mr Dalrymple is tired; we are very selfish."

"No, my dear," said my uncle, "you could not have pleased me better. God bless you both! Yorke, take her away and send Nina."

He kissed Maude, and added,—

"Remember your promise to stay with me. Keep her, Yorke! I am an invalid, and must be humoured."

What a happy *tête-à-tête* we had. All my sorrow was set aside for the moment. Maude was my own again, and never had she been so entirely kind as now—so caressing, so penitent; she comprehended my grief at the prospect of losing my uncle thoroughly, and in her sweet compassion she forgot her coyness, and was as the ministering angel-woman apostrophised by the poet,—

“A spirit still and bright,
With something of an angel light.”

What a frank explanation she gave of that mistaken notion of hers—that I still regretted Adèle; how humbly she acknowledged her own weakness—her inconsiderate selfishness—in breaking her troth because she was too jealous to trust me.

It seemed to me that the misery I had gone through was well rewarded by her present delightful mood; that our reconciliation brought us nearer together than

we could ever have been, if the course of our love had run more smoothly.

"But, Yorke, I am so grieved for you;" she said, after a while, "Mr Dalrymple will not recover. I see the change in his face. And you will suffer, dear Yorke! What can I do for you, my poor Yorke?"

"Nothing more than you are, darling. Your love cannot keep sorrow away; but it softens it. Darling Maude, you have promised to stay and help us all?"

"Yes, but I do not know what Adèle will think; here comes Ernest to look after me, and I wish you would meet him and tell him—I am ashamed to look at him, remembering all my naughtiness. And he has been quite angry with me too all along. And Aunt Agatha," she said, smiling; "Yorke, you cannot believe how Aunt Agatha has scolded me."

"Yes! I can imagine it very well, Maude—poor darling! How miserable you must have been with everybody against you!"

"I was, Yorke, but not because of that ; but I really wanted you, and I thought you would never ask me again."

"Dearest ! How nice of you to say that. But I think you would have asked me, at all events, so it would all have been right some time," I answered teasingly.

"Now, Yorke, you know I never should ! I would have died first."

"It was time somebody interfered, Maude ; you are much too pale and thin."

"Now go," she interrupted quickly, "before Ernest comes, and do not flatter yourself that I was wearing away with grief, on your account, you conceited Yorke."

Ernest Rivers was very pleased to hear that his sister had "come to her senses," as he called it, very willing to leave her with us, and declared himself delighted with the happy prospect Maude had. Poor fellow, he had been anxious enough about it, thinking that she was fading and pinning away in her pride, and that neither of us would make the first advance.

"However, all is well that ends well," he said, with a sigh of relief. I smiled, and he added, "Well, Maxwell, you would not wonder so much at my satisfaction, if you had a saucy sister of your own to look after."

"I shall be very happy when you transfer your responsibility to me," I said. "It will not be my fault if you feel it much longer."

"You will find Maude quite enough to manage," replied Ernest Rivers, laughing.

"I hope so," I said; "because if she did not give me that occupation, it would be awkward, as I have no sister in reserve to be troublesome; after all, you know, Rivers, we had better have too much of a good thing than too little."

"How is Mr Dalrymple to-night?" he asked.

My lightheartedness was gone in a moment.

"No better, I fear, thank you; he is very weak."

"I am sorry to hear it—very sorry! So soon after his return home too. How does Mrs Dalrymple bear it?"

"Wonderfully!" I answered.

"That is well! But I must be off, or my wife will wonder what has become of me. I must first see Maude; where is she hiding herself all this time?"

"I am here, Ernest," said a sweet voice, in a deprecating tone. "Don't begin to talk at me, or I think I shall cry. I do really, Ernest—I am a little overstrung!"

"Overstrung? fiddlesticks!" said the Rev. Ernest irreverently. "One would think, after being wound up to such a pitch so long, you were going to unwind. A pretty dance you have led me to-night, you saucy baggage. But come, I may as well give you a kiss, and tell you I am glad that you have found out what is best for you at last. And I suppose you want me to tell Adèle to send you some fixings, as the Americans say, for Maxwell tells me he will lock all the doors and keep

you a close prisoner here, lest you run away from him after all."

"Don't be foolish, Ernest, but give me the kiss like a dear brother as you are, notwithstanding all your faults, sir; and if you don't take the shortest road, and make the greatest haste imaginable, you will be in Adèle's black books for a week. I thought I could frighten you," she continued, as he hastily took up his hat. "Here, my poor boy, this is your umbrella, and here is another kiss to help you to bear the dreadful calamity that is before you in Adèle's frown."





CHAPTER VIII.

IT WAS WELL WITH NINA.

MANY sad days followed, but Maude was like a sunbeam amongst us ; and like a sunbeam too, she knew when to fade—she was always bright at the right moment, and quiet and sympathetic when every one was too depressed to bear too much cheerfulness.

She was a capital nurse, and I found her a most excellent comforter. My uncle would have her sit by him for an hour at a time, when even I was excluded from their intercourse ; and Nina would be resting. And I always noticed that he looked more peaceful and happy after these

tête-à-têtes, and Maude's eyes were dimmed with unshed tears, and very earnest and anxious.

"What are you talking about so long every day, my uncle and you, Maude?" I once asked.

"Oh, of lots of things, Yorke! Of you a good deal."

"Of me?" I inquired eagerly.

"Yes, 'of course! You don't deserve it, you foolish Yorke, but your uncle thinks the world of you."

"And he is trying to convert you to the same faith, Maude?"

"Perhaps I do not need much converting," she said quietly.

Whereon I rewarded her with a very fond look, and a far fonder embrace. And Maude said demurely,—

"That will do, Yorke—I don't want to be swallowed. But you must not think we have nothing to talk about except you, we have many other subjects far more serious and important."

I thought Nina might be displeased that my uncle seemed to take more pleasure in Maude's company than her own: but she was not. He thought she slept at those times when Maude was alone with him: but I often saw her in her own sitting room in a devotional attitude; and even when we were all together, quietly sitting with my uncle, I watched her often restlessly fingering her rosary, her lips moving meanwhile.

This sight seemed always to distress Maude—she did not believe in beads and crucifixes as aids to worship, and the invocation of saints was, to her mind, quite idolatrous. She had not yet come to believe that different modes of worship to her own might be very sincere and even efficacious. Romanism, to her mind, meant deceit and sophistry.

Mr Hawley came daily: the old man, older by a dozen years or more than my uncle, was hale and hearty, and did his best to direct the sick man's aspirations

heavenwards. But no one could prevent this being a very sad time.

There were days when my uncle slept constantly, and we then had fears whether such would end in the last long sleep; there were others when he was intolerably restless and needed incessant attention; he was irritable at these times, and I noticed that Nina then never left him, but endured all his humours with beautiful patience and compassionate tenderness. I believe these days, so irksome to others, were a blessing to her—he needed her most then, and she could satisfy her yearning heart by constantly ministering to his wants.

One day had been very anxious for us all. He had one of his restless attacks in the morning, and had slept all afternoon. At night he was wakeful and very collected in his mind.

We all sat round his bed—not very near it, for his breathing was painful, and any person very close to him seemed

to obstruct the air. The window was a little open. Nina was busy with her rosary, but, from time to time, she glanced at the precious form on the bed.

Maude was nearer the window ; she was looking up at the sky, her sweet face full of faith and hope, though her lips quivered nervously. I watched them all ; and I saw that, for some time, my uncle had been looking at Maude, and, when I caught her eye, I motioned her to approach him.

He smiled faintly and looked at me. I also went nearer and stood by Maude, and he made an effort to take my hand, still looking at Maude, so I interpreted his wish, and clasped her hand with my own ; he just touched them both with his, and said,—

“Till death—what God—has joined—let no man—put—asunder.”

“Amen !” I said, and Maude echoed my words.

He looked more satisfied.

“Nina,” he whispered again faintly.

She came close to the head of the bed, and he tried to lift his head towards her. Nina sat down on the bed, close to his pillow, and placed her loving arms round him, and so raised him, till he rested against her, his head on her bosom.

He looked at the darkening sky, as Maude had done so earnestly before, and said slowly,—

“A—mansion—for me! Yorke—Maude—my comfort. Nina—sweet—I am happy. The Saviour—Maude.”

And his last conscious glance was at Maude, as if he knew she could understand and sympathise.

We saw his colour change, and Nina laid him back on the pillow. He had fainted, but he never again woke to consciousness. In a very short time he breathed his last.

I held Maude in my arms and soothed her, for she was more upset by the sight of death than any of us.

Nina was like a marble statue. She

calmly closed his eyes, and quietly kissed the dead face of him whom she had so passionately loved. But the doctor, my own friend Chance, for his old partner seldom came out late, who arrived now, as we had sent for him when we first noticed a change in my uncle, said Mrs Dalrymple's calmness was not satisfactory. He talked to her a long time himself about the dead and his love for herself, and asked her, what I thought rather irrelevant questions, about their early acquaintanceship ; but, though she answered gently and sweetly, no tears came. He made every effort to excite this natural outcome of grief.

And then he got Maude to talk to her ; and my darling dwelt upon the circumstances of the past days ; his kind sympathy with ourselves in our love ; his earnest confidence in the Saviour's atonement, as he had expressed himself to her ; his deep love for Nina ; the esteem that every one showed him. Then she recalled

his coming home in triumph so recently ; and her own tears flowed freely while she spoke, but Nina was unmoved.

We took her again to see the corpse, and she kissed him once more gently and quietly, as though she fancied he was sleeping.

Tom Chance now was really alarmed, and sent a note down with the carriage for his partner. In my own anxiety about Nina, the shock of grief was less felt.

Dr Angus came and said, in his blunt way,—

“Now, Mrs Dalrymple, we want you to cry. Your husband is dead, you know. Mr Dalrymple will never speak to you again, never kiss you, is no longer here to shield you from care and trouble. Are you not sufficiently impressed by the awful reality that the husband you have loved is a corpse, to show some natural sorrow at his death? Would he be pleased to see his wife so unmoved at such a time? You must give vent to your feelings, my

dear madam, and not bottle them up. We are all friends here. Faith ! I cannot believe in a woman being so stoical."

She only answered,—

"I cannot weep ; I have not the occasion to weep. There will be no more of parting or of tears," she said, with a rapt gaze upwards. "You are very good ; I thank you, sir, for your kindness. But I am tired now ; I would sleep. If you will let me alone, to-morrow it will be well with Nina. I will go to my own apartment at this moment."

"Will you promise me then to take this bottle of medicine ? It will make you rest more comfortably."

"Certainly, sir, I will do your pleasure."

And she took the bottle, and went immediately to her own room, not even permitting Maude or her maid to attend to her.

After some time had passed the maid went in and reported that she was sleep-

ing calmly, though the bottle was un-emptied on the table, and she had lain down, poor thing, without undressing.

The doctor declared nothing could be better, as her brain wanted rest; and we were all relieved to know that poor Nina was sleeping.

Mr Hawley and his son-in-law came in later, and wished to take Maude away; and, as she looked so haggard and tired, I also asked her to go. She did not quite like leaving Mrs Dalrymple, but we were all so urgent in asking her to do so, that she went. Mr Hawley promised her that Mrs Hawley would be there early to see how Mrs Dalrymple was, and comfort her.

I placed her in the carriage, and whispered a few fond words, and thanked her for the kindness she had shown to my poor uncle, and she pressed my hand, and said,—

“Poor darling Yorke!”

Her words, few as they were, but expressed with much fervour, tranquillised

me. I was glad to spare her any more sorrowful scenes, and, as it happened, I had the greatest reason to be thankful on the morrow that my precious Maude had gone.

Several hours passed before the house wore its usual nightly aspect; not but that it had been all too quiet from the moment that death had entered that far-away chamber. Every one moved about soberly enough; so much so, that the house seemed muffled as well as the voices of its inmates.

But, by degrees, everybody had gone to bed. I did not attempt to seek any rest, and Tom Chance remained the night with me. He slept on and off in his chair, and towards morning I also lost consciousness.

"We were aroused by a loud scream, and started from our seats. Tom rushed upstairs before me, and was met by Nina's maid looking like a ghost.

"My lady!" she gasped; "she is dead!"

She lies just as I left her last night ; and when I went to put a shawl over her, my hand touched hers, and it was cold—like ice !” the girl said, with a shudder, and fell into hysterical weeping.

Tom went straight to the bedroom, saying,—

“Look after that girl, Yorke ; we do not want anything more to happen ; do not follow me ; she is dreaming or fanciful.”

But I saw, by his concerned face, what he dreaded. Others were now thronging the passage and besieging the terrified girl with inquiries, so leaving her to Mrs Mayne, I joined Tom.

His nerves, even, were shaken ; for, as he turned to meet me, his face was very pale.

“It is too true !” he said. “The poor creature is dead ; her grief has killed her ! But I expect her heart was diseased all along.”

I looked at Nina, lying there so peacefully, with the sweetness of countenance

that is noticeable on a child's sleeping face, and I felt that it was, as she had said,—“Well with Nina to-day.” Her perfect features looked like carved marble; a seraphic smile was lingering on her dead lips. She was at peace. All her sorrows were ended—and, shocked and grieved as I was, I knew that a prolonged life would have been one of pain to the heart of that faithful woman.

We buried them side by side. Maude stood with me, as they were laid in their last resting-place. The pomp of circumstance was present even here. The people thronged the churchyard; and the carriages of the rich followed the hearse—it was a melancholy *cortége*, and the more so for this public expression of sympathy. I think there was scarcely a dry eye in the churchyard, so much touched were the hearts of all by the pathetic end of “Nina.”

Maude was so overcome by sorrow, that Mrs Hawley took her to the rectory

to solace her ; and it was at that sweet home, where I had passed so many of my young days, that I received consolation for my own grief in the affection, then so frankly displayed, of my precious Maude.

Aunt Agatha came over to take Maude to Rokeby. She had to relinquish her claim ; but I invited Miss Agatha to come and see us later, when I could prove to her that husbands were not wholly worthless.





CHAPTER IX.

WOMEN AS THEY ARE.

IN a couple of months Maude consented to become my wife. We were quietly married by Mr Hawley; and Ernest Rivers gave Maude to me—that dear gift, which I have cherished ever since as the richest with which mortal man can be endowed.

We went away for twelve months. For that time I gave myself up to happiness, and the enjoyment of watching the effects of travel upon Maude's mind. It expanded wonderfully during that time—knowledge of people and things enlarged her borders, and she left many little narrownesses behind,

in those foreign lands that we had visited, when we returned together to Dalrymple.

I had at first left orders for the wings of the Hall to be pulled down, and an extension of a different style made; but, afterwards, I thought a modern mansion would be a more cheerful home for Maude; and this idea was carried out. It was not built exactly on the old site, so that it was a new Dalrymple entirely that we came to, and not a vestige of the old place was to be seen—it had been carefully removed; and a “garden smiled” where once a house had been.

I was anxious that no ugly reminiscences should darken our home—that we should associate with that dear place nothing but sweetness and harmony.

And it has been so—conjugal love has seemed ever to increase; my wife is beloved and honoured; and our children are blest in their mother.

I have had public duties which have brought responsibilities, and added to my

personal importance and consequence. It has been right to use my time for the benefit of my fellows—at least my wife has always preached that doctrine to me, and not without success ; but I may safely say that my greatest happiness and blessing is in my home. And when I relax from the cares of state, and, surrounded by my wife and children, recall all the happy days and years that are past, my heart lifts itself up in gratitude to the Giver of all.

I have sometimes thought, critically, of the three ladies who have been the most attractive to me. They have come before my mental vision as three types of English womanhood. It has so happened that we have all lived in the same neighbourhood, and opportunities have thus been given me for criticism.

Adèle is a fascinating woman ; and is perhaps regarded with the most universal favour. Always bland and pleasant, good-natured withal, and with a ready smile

of sympathy for people's gladness, and a suitable reception of their griefs, no wonder that she is liked and sought after.

For all that, she is selfish, insincere, vain, and, in a measure, designing. She is quite natural, and perfectly unconscious of her own shortcomings, as she does not go into causes and effects, and harass herself with doubts and anxieties about her duties. She is very winning in manner; and may be seen, in almost any circle, as an important personage, without whose help no pleasant enterprise can be satisfactorily organised.

Helen Chance, again, is just as nature made her—sweet, patient, yielding, and doing all the little duties that arise conscientiously. She is steadfast, true, loving, forgiving, and caressing—a gentle creature, and one who people in sorrow and sickness seek. She does not strive for admiration, affection, or popularity, but accepts everything pleasant that is given her gracefully and calmly.

Her heart is bound up in her home ties, and though she does not decline social amenities, she does not go out of her way to interchange them. This also is a woman whom you can reproduce any day in any society.

Maude—my reader will forgive a little partiality here—is different to both. She is guided by principle. She is anxious to do good. She is often theoretical, but still intensely practical, as a rule. In her eagerness to do right, she is ever planning fresh benevolent projects, in theory excellent, but when put into execution, as they most certainly will be in a very short time, not always found satisfactory.

She is thus constantly making mistakes in her household as well as the outer world; but she as bravely corrects them and begins others—I mean projects, for they are not all mistakes. In this way she has managed to be of service to many, and though her efforts are often useless, her indomitable perseverance is never extinguished. She is fond of setting forth

her own opinions, which are often original, but do not always find favour with her hearers. She is kind, bright, and courteous; but utterly regardless of the praise or blame of mankind—I use the word in its general sense. But the criticism of those near and dear to her is of supreme importance.

On the whole, I fancy she is well suited for the post of lady bountiful, and that she reigns a queen at Dalrymple Hall, as she does in my heart. But I very much doubt whether she is as highly thought of by society as either of the other two ladies. No one does justice to my wife except myself.

Nina alone is unique—a character which *may* be met with in real life now and again, but whose bravery, patience, and devotedness make her, historically, a heroine. She cannot be classified with others—hers was no ordinary love—her death was no ordinary folding of the hands to sleep.



CHAPTER X.

THE CHANCES INCREASED.

“**T**OM, I must go from home at once. What will they all do without me?” said Helen Chance, as her yearning glance embraced all her numerous progeny at present assembled at the dining-table complaisantly enough, with a knife or fork in each busy hand.

They devoured the viands after the manner of healthy children, in an unconcerned, business-like fashion. It was a mere exercise of muscular dissection; pausing not to detect a faulty flavour; eager not to allow the palate discrimination,

but simply greedy of consumption and conscious of the exorbitant demands of the vigorous appetite being in excess of the powers of the mincing machine. The worn, delicate-looking mother, placid still, and smiling a gentle welcome to her husband, as he came in late from his rounds, continued with some agitation.

"I had this telegram just now, Tom. Mrs Ormonde is dying, it tells me. Poor dear! Her release is coming at last; I—"

"Ours, you may add," interrupted Tom with his usual flippancy. "No more cold dinners, boys; no more tired hours, dear wife."

"Tom," said his wife reprovingly, "think of poor Mrs Ormonde and all her goodness to us. We have scarcely felt the pinch of poverty, even with this family of ten; for she has so often thoughtfully remembered me."

"Quite true, Helen, my dear. If it had not been for your own scruples about letting her know how the land lay, she

would have helped you more. But I have nothing to say against your pride in that respect—it was highly becoming—highly becoming, but confoundedly awkward. Well, well, the old lady's days have been longer than one could have hoped for, ahem! And you must go, my dear, you think? Is that necessary?"

"Yes, Tom. She has asked for me, and if she had not, would it not seem heartless to be absent when we of all people are to get the money?" said Helen, in reproachful accents.

"Ah, my dear," replied Tom encouragingly, "there is something in that. Perhaps it would be as well for me to go and look after the loaves and fishes for you; and then you would not have to tear yourself away from this interesting crew of juveniles."

"It is not that, Tom," interrupted Helen in distress. "I ought to go—I should like to go! I would not leave the children for anything else, but I am

really sorry—this is sad to me. One feels the separation of death at any time, and if some one has understood one, and sympathised with one—as dear Mrs Ormonde has with me—one feels it is losing so much,” and Helen’s tears flowed freely.

“Come, come, love, do not fret. It is only natural,” said Tom Chance soothingly. “One never knows how women will act—they see things in such a comical light. Here is matter for rejoicing—an old, infirm body ripe in years called away—a young and needy family supplied with a certain living.”

“That is true too, Tom ; and the poor thing has lately been less active in mind and body. I cannot grieve to hear the end is near, but I feel it nevertheless. That is the worst of growing older ; you have so many painful recollections, so many interests gone out of your life.”

“Some remain still,” said Tom Chance dryly, with a lugubrious glance at the twenty busy hands at the table. The

children interpreted his look aright, and laughed simultaneously.

"Which can you spare, papa? Here we all are. Pick and choose, and send the rest adrift."

"Now, collective impudence, silence! You are here and tolerated—make the best of that. Which could I spare indeed? Ten of you!"

The older children shouted admiringly.

"You sha'n't! You sha'n't! We will not budge! Mother wants us."

And the younger ones, gradually gaining confidence from the audacity of their seniors, joined chorus as the fact of their being essential to their mother's happiness became a certainty to their childish instinct.

Helen Chance dried her tears to smile benignantly on her children.

"What do you say to my going too, Helen?" asked Tom. "To take care of my wife, if I may not of her property."

"Could you?" asked Helen eagerly.

"But no! That would be impossible just now. If our own household could do without you, there are some which could not. I do not forget that my husband is a kind of public benefactor."

And Helen looked at him with admiring, inspiring eyes—eyes which testified to their owner's belief in his powers, and which, therefore, were an incentive to effort—those loving eyes which had directed Tom Chance so honestly, which had been alike his solace and his conscience."

"What are assistants for?" asked Tom abruptly, disappointed in his hopes of a holiday.

"To help you, dear," said Helen soothingly. "Nobody can be quite *you*—your own clever self, Tom. Of course you must get away sometimes, or you would be worked to death.

Tom made a grimace, indicative of his discomfort at countenancing his wife's error of judgment; but he was a husband, and he felt that it would be by no means wise

to open her eyes to the fact that he neither loved work, nor overtaxed brain nor body in his professional duties.

Helen continued,—

“This damp weather is unhealthy at Dalrymple, and there is so much low fever prevalent, that it would never do for you to leave just now, Tom. I must go alone, disagreeable as it is.”

“I suppose you must, if you say it,” said Tom somewhat sulkily. “What am I to do with these urchins, I should like to know? These inveterate brawlers!—these domestic pests!—these rapacious youngsters who eat a man out of house and home. They devour all the meat *now*—they’ll clear the bones off when the mother is absent, and leave empty dishes for the poor paterfamilias when he comes in tired and hungry.”

A riotous laugh greeted his fatherly humour, and impudence becoming rife, they shouted,—

“Hot meat every day, pa! You said,

'No more cold dinners.' We'll begin the hot to-morrow. Are we all agreed? Yes! Then say so. Agreed! Agreed! Agreed! Agreed! Four voices only. Those who miss to have no dinner. Out with it all round, one simultaneous—a-a-greed!"

"Papa and boys, this is not right," said Helen's gentle voice; "the noise is dreadful, but there is a false principle in rejoicing at calamity. Listen, children! Suppose you were to be promised a great treat. Should you like it?"

"Yes, yes!" in eager chorus.

"But suppose you knew that if you had the treat some other person would suffer a great deal of pain, should you wish still to have the treat?"

"I don't know! Yes! No! We should like it, but not so much. A treat's a treat, and we should forget everything else."

"Your remark has elicited a variety of opinions, Helen," said Tom Chance drily; "mostly natural and in favour of treats.

You should never moralise to children; they are too mortally practical. Let me see! The ayes and the noes were pretty evenly balanced in this case, being, one might assume, representative of the disposition of both parents; but, in veritable fact, being evidence only of the strength or weakness of the puppets. You, mamma, pull the strings and some of the puppets are willing dupes, while the rest assert their own independence by untoward movements."

"Tom, you always make fun of my efforts to improve the children. Luckily, they understand you, and they have the good sense to know that you—"

"That my bark is worse than my bite, to quote the familiar," said Tom, laughing. "To be serious, children, your mother's an angel, 'too bright and good for human nature's daily food,' so you must do without her from this day forth till—"

"When—when, papa? We'll all go with her; we will not be left! We'll have

dirty hands every meal time till she comes back! We won't fasten our boot laces! We'll not go to bed till ten o'clock, and we'll never get up till dinner-time! We'll tie tin kettles to the cat's tail and shoot catapults at the neighbours' windows! We should never be good at all only to please you, and if you won't take us with you, mamma, you can't expect us to behave."

"There's training for you, Helen," said Tom Chance, laughing. "It's eye-service after all, and, as I said, the puppets assert their originality at times—about once every hour, poor wife, I imagine."

"Nonsense, Tom! The children are good children. You have but to encourage their better feelings and they are orderly at once. They want looking after certainly—all children do. Their slippers to be hunted up from odd corners and tops of wardrobes; their ties to be rescued from the rails of the footboards perhaps, when they have amused themselves with using them as pulleys to jerk themselves back-

wards and forward on their pillows. They are a little careless about the cleanliness of their hands and nails ; and I must say they scatter their crumbs indiscriminately. And perhaps it needs a little patience to get them all settled down for the night, and again in the morning to get them all up in time for breakfast ; but really I have nothing to complain of in the children—no grave fault.”

“They are pattern children, no doubt, my dear,” interrupted her husband ironically ; “but you cannot expect a man to fetch and carry like a woman, and I hope you do not imagine these maternal duties will devolve upon me in your absence ?”

“Certainly not, Tom,” said Helen, with a smile. “The children will do their best to help themselves when I am gone. The only thing I fear is a scrimmage with the servants, but your authority will prevent that, to say nothing of their own good sense,” and the mother looked admonishingly at the ten. “One thing I do

The Chances Increased.

hope, Tom, that you will interest yourself a little about their health. Evy has been quiet all the morning; I have scarcely heard her voice, and her head and hands are hot."

"Let me see the patient," said Tom jokingly. "Ah, there she is—not much wrong, I see. You can fast, Evy, till to-morrow morning. That is better than physic and more palatable."

"But I shall be hungry, pa," expostulated the little girl.

"So much the better, child. You will learn a lesson of self-denial. There, my love"—to his wife—"nothing like a practical test. It is better than all your theories which, I am bound to say, your tenderness prevents your carrying into practice."

"That is not fair, Tom. Now, listen dear children—I am speaking to you all from the least to the oldest—I put you on your honour to behave your best while I am gone from you. It is a great t

for me to leave you, even for a short time, but it is my duty and I do it. I expect you, my darlings, to do your duty also; to vie with each other as to which shall be most orderly; to keep back all hasty speeches; to be considerate to the servants; to keep very quiet when papa is in the house, only you must talk to him in a nice, sensible way to amuse him."

"A nice, sensible way! I like that, mother. Who ever heard of a boy talking like a book? I never heard papa even; only you, dear mater," and her eldest born, a lanky fellow of thirteen, nestled close to her side, rubbing his head caressingly against her shoulder.

"My dear boy, you know very well what I mean. I want you all to be really good and thoughtful; and if you promise that, I know I can trust you not to break your word, because that would grieve me more even than your bad conduct—that is, all your usual naughtinesses, you collective impudence, as your father

calls you, all that arises from exuberant spirits, and which your mother excuses. My darlings, you cannot expect everybody to have patience with you. It is a different thing when you promise to be good—promises are responsible things. Now, do not promise unless you mean to perform. In fact, I will not take your promise, but confide in your honour only. You elder boys are very fond of singing that inspiring naval song on the death of Nelson. Sing it every day with an impromptu refrain—"Mother" expects that every "boy" this day will do his duty.' It will remind you of me."

Helen Chance's sweet eyes were dewy, as the children exclaimed,—

"We don't need that to remind us. We shall never forget you for a minute, mother."

A bell just then rang loudly and put a stop to sentiment on the part of the children, easily diverted from it by the curiosity natural to their age.

"The surgery bell, papa. Some one is ill. Perhaps it is old Tobias Kent, papa, seized with apoplexy. He looked as if he had been semi-strangled this morning—so purple and bloated. I had a bet with Horace that he would be your next patient. May we run and see, pa?"

"By all means, boys, if it will take you away and prevent your tongues from clacking. But, Helen, this is too bad, just when I wanted to talk to you. Jones must go! What are assistants for?"

This was a very favourite query of Tom Chance. He was constantly and ungratefully abusing this poor overworked hack behind his back; though to his face he was sufficiently civil, for he knew Jones's services to be particularly valuable to a lazy practitioner, as he never grumbled at work, but patiently plodded on, expecting only the smallest remuneration consistent with the dignity of his assistantship.

The said Jones was sincerely attached

to the family; and when he saw poor Mrs Chance faded and worried, with all the continuous contriving to make both ends meet, he was wont to begrudge himself of even his small salary, and would sit in the surgery lamentably regarding his boots and well-worn-coat sleeves, as if repining at the undurability of leather, and the necessity that a doctor's assistant should be decently and suitably clothed.

Helen knew this; and even as Tom uttered his usual query, she remembered that no one would rejoice in their imminent prosperity more than Jones.

"Boys, dear, please ask Mr Jones to take papa's work this afternoon; and you can tell him—there is no harm in that, Tom, and it will please him—that mamma has had some—well, some news!—good news in one way, though you must remember I am very sorry, boys, to hear that a good old friend is to be taken from me," and Helen's sympathetic voice broke a little. "Perhaps you had better say

nothing about it, boys—it isn't good news—indeed it isn't to me, although it will make everything easier for us, Tom," and Helen Chance wept again.

"All right, mother," said Tom, junior, "but I don't think I'll keep it dark from old Jones. I'll just say, 'Go and see old Tobias Kent for father, there's a good fellow—I know it's Kent—only apoplexy would ring so furiously.' Jones will be off like a shot, and I'll shout after him, 'They've some news in there, Jones!' Tom, junior, pointed with his thumb over his shoulder from the passage, where he now stood, to the dining-room door. 'Pa is awful jolly about it, Jones ; but women are squeamish, and mother cried a lot. There's to be hot meat constant, so I guess we shall have high jinks shortly !' Jones isn't a dull fellow, nor a bad sort—he'll understand it all sharp. And won't he shuffle those old boots of his down cannily, to see old Kent ? He'll scarcely feel the ground," and Tom, junior, proceeded down

the passage with long strides, lifting his feet extremely high, with a little spring at each step, after the manner of the assistant when in an elevated frame of mind.

Young Tom speedily returned with a telegram in his hand, and Tom Chance, as he took it from him, exclaimed,—

“What the deuce and all does that rascally fellow pull the surgery bell for, with no necessity stronger than a telegram—startling a man out of his domestic comfort? My love, my dear wife, your journey need not be taken to-day. The poor old lady has sunk more rapidly than was expected. She is gone, Helen! This wire says, ‘If not set out, no need Mrs Chance come. Mrs Ormonde breathed her last peaceably this morning.’”

Tom Chance took his wife affectionately in his arms.

“Do not weep for her, Helen!” he said with some feeling. “She was a good creature in her life, and death had no dread for her, thank God! Fourteen

years ago, my wife, I prophesied that she would live long enough for you to revel in the difficulties of domestic life; but I did not think her days would be so many as those of fourteen years. It has been waiting for dead men's shoes, as it were; but, on the whole, I can say I have never begrudged Mrs Ormonde her money. These long, struggling years have made me know the value of the best wife in England. And we have been happy, have we not, Helen?"

"Yes, Tom dear, so happy! More than happy—content. Tom, dearest, you have never repined. You have helped me always by your cheerfulness, good temper, and buoyant temperament—ours has been a blessed union."

"So it has, wife; but, to make a clean breast of it, when, fourteen years ago, I told you that, though I rejoiced in the prospect of your luck, no poverty would diminish my affection for you, I did not calculate upon 'the ten'—*that* has

been something of a hardship ; but, thank God, through all, our love has stood the test."

"I would not have them one less, Tom, such comforts as they always are ; so bright and lively, and all well and strong in mind and body. I am never tired of remembering this blessing."

"Dear, fond mother," said Tom tenderly, "yours has been a weary task, but it will be lightened now. My wife can fold her hands together in graceful idleness now. The battle is over for her."

"Never, Tom ! While my children need me, I shall never fail them—never derogate the precious duties of a mother to another. But I am glad, Tom, for you, and them, and myself that we can take such change as may be needful for our health collectively, and not in factions as hitherto ; now one and then another billeted on a friend, as need occasioned. We will make a holiday together, the dozen of us, before long, and leave poor Mr Jones in charge. One thing

I stipulate for, Tom,—that poor man's salary must be doubled."

"If we can afford so much it shall, my love," said Tom. "And I am sure if you make no bones of the encumbrance of ten children, I will try and regard them philosophically too. But I have often wondered why in the world the poor doctor should have such a goodly quiverful of bairns, while your lady friend at the Hall has only four. And though Adèle Rivers has six, they are no more trouble to her than Maude's four. It is our management, as regards the trouble our children make, though the quantity must be taken into consideration."

"If Adèle Rivers is not troubled with her six, her husband is," said Helen, a little offended. "He is father and mother in one, it seems to me."

"It appears so," said Tom oracularly; "that sort of business would not suit me, but you cannot deny that Madame Adèle commands her children well."

"And her husband too, Tom; you must not forget that," said Helen mischievously.

"He is a born fool to stand it, then," said Tom. "I believe a selfish woman can always command—it's the all-important *ego* which claims respect. A selfish mother invariably has good children—that is to say, docile, submissive ones, because she herself has to be considered so much that there is no room for others, and the children learn to study all her whims and forget their own. But you may depend upon it, Helen, when they come to years of discretion, they will have scanty respect for their mother. On the whole, I rather envy the next generation—the parents will err in the contrary direction and be too indulgent, being themselves sick of the restraint which subdued their own childhood so woefully. I go into many homes, and there is little attempt to hide the defective domestic policy from the familiar medical adviser, and I have ob-

served conspicuous failure in all directions. Sometimes it becomes necessary to subdue children, as the life and well-being of a delicate parent may depend upon such a system of suppression ; but it is always a lamentable picture to me. Now, Adèle Rivers has the best of health and nerves of iron. You, my poor Helen, are a mere pigmy to her as regards vitality, and yet she never sacrifices her own comfort for that of her family, as you do. On the whole, dear, take the satisfaction of knowing that I approve of your treatment of our children ; of your beneficent *régime*, from an outside view ; from medical considerations ; from a philanthropic aspect ; but, selfish man that I am, I regret the necessity of allowing the young ideas scope. Still, I would let things be. I am quite *au fait* at enduring the inevitable, and to permit one's children to grow up free from physical and mental deformity, one must give them present freedom to a considerable extent, by which we ensure

to them the power of expansion. Alas ! my dear, conscientious Helen, I see, more and more clearly, that to live among children needs the most entire and literal self-repression—it is a weary life, but presently you will have your reward.”

“Now!” exclaimed Helen Chance eagerly. “Every day ! Every hour ! Is it nothing that my children love and revere me ? Is it nothing that my husband, at this moment, is praising me ? Is it nothing that, with God’s blessing, my ten children are educating for eternity. My poor labour and self-denial are nothing—nothing ! The children’s future is far more to me ; and their present happiness is my supreme pleasure.”

“Why am I blessed with such a wife and such a mother to my children ?” said Tom Chance solemnly.

“Because you give us so much, Tom, darling—such love, support and sympathy. Why, dear, you are our very sunshine. The boys anticipate no gloomy looks nor cheer

less words from you ; they have never known them, as some children have. If they are set upon mischief, that they can make a clean breast of it to their father is a safeguard from less innocent evil ; and if they are sick, how each little face brightens when father's smiles and bright speeches are bestowed upon the invalid ! As for me, Tom, all these happy traits of disposition keep my heart perpetually joyous ; and I love to trace the same in our boys, thinking what a blessing they will be in future days, in other homes than that of their parents. But I could talk about you and the children all day, Tom, if you would let me, and there was nothing more practical to do. As it is, for the next few days I shall be busy preparing such mourning as will be necessary for me and the children."

"Yes, I suppose you must put the complimentary border upon all our garments for a few weeks ; but that need not make you busy *now*, Helen. You need only

superintend these little changes, my dear," said Tom grandiloquently.

"You must let Mr Maxwell know, Tom, before he hears it from a stranger," said Helen. "He has been our true friend—it seems to me he has helped us both to our living and our fortune, as, without him, we should have had neither."

"My dear Helen, I *must* vindicate my own ability. If I consented, out of friendship, to accept this berth at the hands of Yorke Maxwell, it was not entirely from selfish motives. He was then pining in solitude, and my society was important to him. Never, till this day, had I any suspicion that my wife doubted my power to succeed in my profession in any locality which I might have adopted as the scene of my labours. Pshaw! Our obligations to Yorke Maxwell are not great—a mere bagatelle. I, Tom Chance, could have defied his assistance, and that of the world at large, in my younger days. I was born to succeed, and I did."

"I don't doubt it," said Helen tearfully.

"Let it rest then, my dear," said Tom magnanimously.

"Only, Tom, I do not like you to cast off your good old friend as you seem lately to do."

"Nothing of the sort, Helen! We are the best of friends. We are not constantly together, it is true; we have outgrown each other, so to speak. He is occupied in the wide arena of political life; and I not less so in the more limited, if more scientific circle of professional activity. The fact of the matter is, we are no longer necessary to each other. To speak plainly, *you* are the chief cause of our separation."

"I?" inquired Helen breathlessly.

"Yes; you are ballast enough for any one weak man—an exaggerated dose would kill, while a nicely calculated sufficiency cures. You can understand my simile, if you will, Helen. On the other hand, Yorke was always able to stand alone;

but he preferred a little crutch by the way to prevent fatigue—his heaviness would literally have exhausted him without some relief. He found it in what you please to call my happy traits of disposition. Now all is changed; he has piquant sauce enough for his liking in that lively, assertive wife of his."

"Tom, my dear Tom, she is my dearest friend, and one of the sweetest, truest women in the world."

"That may be," replied Tom, "but she is objectionable to me for sundry reasons. She never talks at a fellow; but she looks her disapproval confoundedly often," he added pettishly; "and she pities my wife openly. Also she gives herself airs. Considering that she was once a poor governess, I am justified in declaring her to be consequential and arrogant."

"Tom, how blind you are to her noble nature!" said Helen regretfully. "How much you misjudge the one woman in the world whom I must honour!"

“ ‘That, perhaps, is the whole sum of the matter,’ as Tupper hath it,” said Tom jocosely. “Be that as it may, with all Mrs Maxwell’s excellencies, I prefer Adèle Rivers’ conversation. And what does a man want more, from any woman but his wife, than to be flattered and amused ? ”

“Tom, I should be no good wife to you, if I did not warn you that, although you have those happy traits of disposition, you are vain, and sensitive to fancied disapproval. The former age will cure—the latter will increase with the mortifications of the former, and will never add either to your happiness or renown. They are both weaknesses unworthy of ‘my Tom.’ ”

“The surgery bell again, and Jones is out, Helen. I must be off! I forgive you for this calumny,” said Tom heroically, as he went to the post of duty.





CHAPTER XI.

AUNT AGATHA A TURNCOAT.

YORKE MAXWELL had just returned from a ride—not a ride without an object, or one of pleasure only. It was seldom that Yorke Maxwell had leisure for that.

But he had been to the nearest town on magisterial business, and had returned dusty and tired. Maude had darted to the front door at the first sound of horse's hoofs, with her old rapidity of movement, and had taken him by tender force to the drawing-room for a cup of tea. A luxurious chair was drawn up to the window, and Maude gently pushed him towards it.

"Must I, dear?" said Yorke affectionately. "I really am not fit for your domain. I have brought a peck of dust in with me, for the roads are in a shocking state. But if I must, I must, no doubt, dear, so give me your best cup of tea, Maude, and let me dream of idleness and seclusion for the next half-hour."

The husband's fond eyes followed the dainty form that flitted about the room, now to draw down a blind to screen his face from the sun, and then to pour the tea with the care that solicited his approval of the brew; and when the cup was handed by herself, he caught the small fingers and held her thus near him.

"Little queen of Dalrymple," he whispered, almost adoringly.

"Oh, you silly man!" said Maude, laughing and kissing him. "When shall I cure you of these adulations? It is well no one overhears you. What would Aunt Agatha say?"

Yorke Maxwell made a ludicrous and deprecating grimace.

"You need not make fun of Aunt Agatha, Yorke. If it had not been for her objection to marriage, I might, in the first place, never have contemplated it. I was very perverse in those days, Yorke."

"Very, Maude," said her husband, becoming more affectionate as these old memories floated through his brain. "Sweet, little, perverse Maude!"

"That is all past, Yorke," said the more matter-of-fact wife.

"Not quite; you are still little, still sweet-looking—still—don't be angry, love; if you were not a little wilful at times, your husband would be disappointed. All those little 'makings-up' again have been so delightful—so racy. Maude sweet! Maude wilful! Maude humble! All *my* Maudes, and characteristic of the most winning little woman on God's earth."

"You are too good and generous to me,

Yorke," said Maude. "Aunt Agatha says you spoil me. She declares you are the only man she ever saw who was worthy of a woman; and she wishes I had submitted to her judicious training, that you might have had, in a copy of herself, a wife suited to so unique a spouse."

Maude laughed gaily.

"And my little wife tells her that I am full of faults! That she is altogether mistaken in her estimate of my worth!" said Yorke Maxwell, inquiringly.

"That isn't quite fair, Yorke. You want me to lay bare my wifely delinquencies—my little vexations of spirit, which find an outlet in traducing my husband to a safe confessor," said Maude, with something of her old pretty pout.

Husbands do somehow like their wives to renew these old familiar little coquetries, in the privacies of a *tête-à-tête* occasionally, and Maude knew how to use her natural advantages in this respect.

Yorke Maxwell looked grave, for, ancient

husband as he was, he had never lost his anxiety to be assured of his wife's love and approval of him.

"Now, don't look like the grim husband, Yorke, ready to revenge his wife's disloyalties. I am really very loyal—not in words only, but in heart. I tell Aunt Agatha she can never know half your goodness as I do; and that I wish with all my heart I could discover some means of improving myself, to render poor, little, worthless Maude a fitting wife for such a natural grandee."

The tears were in the merry eyes, for a moment earnest in their utter aspiration, and she laid her hand in her husband's, as she said,—

"You seem

'Scarce other than my own ideal knight,
Who revered his conscience as his king—'

She quoted no further, for Yorke Maxwell drew her to him.

"My love, my queen! I did not seek

to draw such a eulogium from your lips; far too high for mortal man, and least of all for such a man as Yorke Maxwell. However, my dearest, we cannot do better than each set up the highest standard for ourselves and each other, and seek, by mutual help, to grow towards it—groping, may be, but still advancing. And our children, Maude! We help them in helping ourselves, so making our example worthy to be followed. They *will* follow it, whether good or bad—whether we wish it or no. Home influence is strong.”

“Dear children!” said Maude, “they are so good and bonny; it makes me tremble to think they may become bad or evil.”

“We live by faith, Maude. In this, as in all, we must trust the future, doing our best to-day. Sometimes, darling, I am faithless; and it comes in my mind to imagine what my life would be, bereft of you, or the children. And I am selfish, Maude. I dread any interruption to our

privacy. when we are down in the country here. When first your Aunt Georgina died, I thought perhaps Aunt Agatha would come and rob me of this dual life with you."

"It might have been, Yorke," said Maude. "And if she had suggested it, we should neither of us have had the heart to refuse."

"I would not," said Yorke Maxwell decidedly. "One may get too selfish in one's domestic life—what one idolises is oftenest one's temptation."

"Oh fie! faithless man!" exclaimed Maude. "Never preach trust to me again. Whatever is that rumbling noise, Yorke? A carriage so late—it is no caller. Why, it might be Aunt Agatha. There is no one else to come so unceremoniously. It must be she! And yet it is but a day or two since she left us."

"She has come!" laughed Yorke Maxwell. "It is the beginning of the end! There is little fear of my getting selfishly

absorbed in home life. A trio never becomes engrossed—two to agree, and one to differ, no unity but more originality. I am prepared for this dreadful discord, so you need not look at me with imploring eyes, Maude.”

“Do you remember, Yorke, that it was this view, as it were from this same window, that first created my admiration for Dalrymple—this wide expanse of field and sky, that even now seems to relieve my brain and clear away obscurities. Do you recollect that day when I treated you so badly, long ago, Yorke?”

“I do, Maude! And it was for that reason that I planned this for the site of your drawing-room. I thought in its quiet recesses you would have plenty of time to repent your singular treatment of me.”

“Singular treatment, sir? How dare you call maiden modesty singular? Would you have had me jump into your arms, to absolve you from the pains and penal-

ties of wooing, consequent upon a man's position of supremacy?"

"Since you acknowledge *that*, my wife, I am content. But you did your best at that time, to make me believe in the sovereignty of woman, and somehow I cannot forget the lesson. I yield you it now from courtesy, and call you, as I have a thousand times to your vexation, 'Queen of Dalrymple'."

"I was going to say, Yorke, that if Aunt Agatha invades us, you must be the same to me—you must let no one come between us. We must have our dear old talks the same, and *you* must manage it. Aunt Agatha always does what you like."

"I shall take care to be lord of my own house, Maude; you may depend upon that. If my wife has the privilege of ruling me, no one else has. I'll manage Aunt Agatha, if—and by—excuse me, Maude, I nearly transgressed. Here she comes!"

The footman announced Miss Graham;

but Aunt Agatha put him aside with an imperious gesture.

"Out of my way, man. I am not a stranger in the house, that I wish to adopt as my home. A pair of turtle doves together, it seems! I'm in the way, perhaps. If so, say it out plainly, Maude and Yorke Maxwell, and the poor lonely, old woman will order her traps back to the carriage that brought them and her here. Oh no! they are not all taken out yet, and it will be easy to put them back."

"You are very welcome to Dalrymple, Aunt Agatha," said Yorke Maxwell, coming forward with that deferential air, which Miss Agatha loved.

And Maude kissed her impetuously.

"Of course we love to have you, Aunt Agatha."

"Take care of my bonnet; you are crushing it, child. There is no of course in the matter. Of course you are glad to see me, on a visit—of course a tem-

porary guest would be treated with attention and respect. I have proved that in my former visits, or I should not be here now."

Miss Agatha emphasised each "of course," most emphatically.

"Children! You, Maude, my dead sister's only child! You, Yorke Maxwell, the son of my adoption." And Miss Agatha made a pathetic change in the usually hard metallic voice. "I come to you lonely, bereaved, insulted. Will you take me in? It will not be for long. Death covets the old. Maude, child, put me a chair, I am weary. Put your husband a chair also, child. He looks fagged. Expending your strength on your duty as usual, son of my adoption?"

Her rapid change from the sentimental to the practical made both hearers laugh, but Miss Agatha disapproved of laughter.

"Are you both taking leave of your senses?" she said tartly. "This is a specimen of your politeness, is it? To laugh

at an old woman. Perhaps I had better be going. I'm one too many."

"No, no, Aunt Agatha; a thousand times no! You must stay and teach us better. Let me undo your bonnet, dear aunt. There, there! You look more comfortable now."

And Maude tenderly smoothed the thin grey hair, meeting no reproof for her forwardness as she might have done years ago."

"It is pleasant to feel you belong to somebody, child," she said, with as much affection in her tone as any one could expect from Aunt Agatha. "Then I am to stay, I suppose?" she continued, looking critically at Yorke.

"Certainly, Miss Agatha, if you will make our house your home we shall feel that you mean to honour us by the selection."

"You are mighty polite; too much so for sincerity, I fear," was Miss Agatha's ungracious answer; but she looked nevertheless highly gratified.

"Your home for always now, dear aunt," said Maude affectionately.

"That's coming to the point, child, and I consent to meet your wishes—your combined desire, yours and Yorke's. As long as you like to have me, you will hear no objection from me," said Aunt Agatha regally. "At the same time, I must tell you, Maude, if it had not been for Yorke—my dear pattern boy—I should not have agreed to the proposition. Maude, you are not fit to tie your husband's shoes, nor never will be."

"I am sure, Aunt Agatha," interrupted Yorke, "Maude is a most excellent wife, far better than I deserve."

"That is very pretty," interrupted Miss Agatha, "but you do not cheat an old woman with such moonshine."

"Quite right, Aunt Agatha, to be dubious," said Maude, laughing. "I am contented to shine as reflected light."

"You may be contented, but you will

never shine, Maude, so I charge you to fling away that ambition."

Miss Agatha put her lips together primly, after her manner when saying something smart. Maude smiled, but continued mischievously,—

"You are quite a turncoat, Aunt Agatha. After being a man-hater all these years, you fall down and worship like the rest of us women."

"I only worship my Maker," said Miss Agatha. "As for being a turncoat, I was always quite willing to appreciate a man, if I could find occasion for it. They are a disappointing lot, all of them. Your husband is one of the best, but it is not saying much."

"All I can say, Aunt Agatha, here is one who will do his best to second Maude's efforts to make your life with us happy and pleasant."

"I calculated upon that, or else I shouldn't be here," said Aunt Agatha. "How are the children? Quiet and

orderly, or in their usual obstreperous condition? Both good and well you say, Maude? Then they are the first children that ever remained in that condition for an hour, so how can you answer for them? No doubt you two have been closeted together for most of the afternoon, and have left those wretched little anomalies to their fate. Are those tea things for show, child, or use?" she continued, looking round for another cause of offence.

"You remind me of my duties, aunt," replied Maude. "You must have some tea before you go upstairs."

"I don't care particularly for cold tea, Maude."

"And I will not offer it you, aunt," said Maude, with imperturbable good humour. "I will ring for some more, or, if you like it better, I can bring you some to your bedroom with my own hands."

"Humph! I should hope you are not too much of a fine lady to object to wait-

ing upon the aunt who nursed you as a baby," replied Miss Agatha; but she was mollified by Maude's consideration, and said, with a grand conciliatory air,—

"I will take tea here, then, and recount my troubles to you and Yorke. You need not leave us, Yorke. I want you clearly to understand what a cantankerous individual you are sheltering."

For Yorke Maxwell, imagining himself relieved from duty, was lingering longingly about the door. He resigned himself to the necessity of humouring his guest with admirable politeness; and Miss Agatha continued,—

"Cantankerous! Yes, that was what she called me—my own servant too, who had lived with me, off and on—for she had a temper, and was apt to take offence at trifles, and absent herself without warning, even in Georgina's time; but off and on she had lived with me for twenty years. You remember Dorcas, Maude? Old Dorcas you used to call her; but she is not so

old as I am myself, child, by many a year."

Maude remembered her, and also she had a vague suspicion that, after any of these frequent lapses of service, Miss Georgina had coaxed old Dorcas back again, giving her a present as an inducement.

"Well," continued Miss Agatha, "when I got back home, after being with you so long, I found the house all sixes and sevens, and I told Dorcas at once that 'it was time I came home to wake *her* up.' She answered impudently, 'That she did not need *me* to wake her up;' but I was too spiritless at the time to retort."

Aunt Agatha spiritless! It seemed such a calamity to Maude that she involuntarily stretched forth her hand to lay it on that of Miss Agatha.

"Well, child, one cannot be always wound up to the proper pitch, and I had had a long journey. And when I went into my own little drawing-room I

thought of this room, and of you and Yorke—and even of the children. Yes, Maude, I pined for the children, odd as you may think it.”

Maude could only look her sympathy, as Miss Agatha continued rapidly,—

“Then, Yorke and Maude, I fell to thinking of poor Georgina, and how comfortable she had always made me on my other returns home; and I thought of her gentle, soothing voice till—I couldn’t bear it, my heart broke.”

And Miss Agatha shed a few tears, which were wrung from her inflexible heart with infinite pain.

“Poor Aunt Agatha!” said Maude.

“Not so poor, child; but I must own I was worsted then. The next morning Dorcas was very grumpy, and, upon my giving her some directions about her work, she declared, ‘*She* was not going to be ordered about by a cantankerous old woman; she would go first.’ I said, ‘Go!’ sternly. And would you believe it, Yorke

and Maude, I have never seen Dorcas since. I waited till the next morning for her, fully determined to wait no longer. I assure you, Maude, I was quite afraid she would come back and deprive me of my excuse for returning here. However, thank goodness, she didn't. Not but what I am fond of Dorcas, but I had got it into my head that I should soon follow poor Georgina, if I were pent up in those small rooms, in solitude and distress of mind."

"It is all past now, aunt," said Maude, "and Dorcas will be very sorry when she finds out that you would not be humbugged by her. This little episode will be a lesson to her. In a short time she will write begging you to receive her back, and you must do so, Aunt Agatha. No one will understand you so well as Dorcas, and she will be your very own maid here, with little to do, and that will make her more amiable."

"That would suit me well enough," said

Aunt Agatha ; "and I suppose it is one's duty to provide for old servants. Yorke, you will perhaps oblige an old woman some day by going over to Rokeby to sell off my furniture—all except my desk and books, and some trifles that Georgina prized."

"I will go whenever you like, Aunt Agatha — next week if you think proper."

"That's the worst of you young people," replied Aunt Agatha ; "you are too rapid and impetuous. Let everything be done decently and in order. There is no need to hasten matters—they generally do that for themselves. For instance, dust and dirt will prevent needless delay. But next week is far too soon. Well, I think everything is nicely settled now, Maude and Yorke. What a good thing that new Wesleyan chapel is built for me."

Aunt Agatha had an idea that everything which suited her was arranged for her special benefit, and to her dying day

she spoke of "my new chapel" with great satisfaction.

"You will not object to my mode of worship, Yorke?" she asked inquiringly, being fully prepared to brave his objections on any subject, if he ventured to bring them forward. But Yorke Maxwell said,—

"Not at all, Aunt Agatha. Fight it out with the rector. I attend church, but I would have every man or woman follow his or her own bent in religion, as in other things."

"Maude, I am ready to go upstairs now. It is a weak cup of tea, and has an objectionable flavour."

"So sorry, dear aunt."

"You don't look it, child. However, you do your best. Perhaps my taste is not reliable to-day. I know my way about the house, and, thank goodness, I can carry my own bag, so don't be officious. I will sleep in the green room, Maude, facing south. The room you put me in last was

drafty and poky. I don't want to be reminded of Rokeby, when I come to a fine place like Dalrymple. If the children are too noisy for me, perhaps they might have that nice large room facing west for a nursery. I should not then be annoyed by hearing them slapped by cruel nurses, nor suspicious muffled tones out of a cupboard, as though the children were being smothered."

"Aunt Agatha," said Maude in a horrified voice, "you would never hear that! I have a most reliable woman as head nurse."

"A humbug, no doubt," said Miss Agatha as a parting word, and with an indescribable sniff, expressive of her power to discover deceit. She returned for a moment to say, "Well, Yorke and Maude, I have been about as cantankerous as I could well make myself, but I wanted to test the sincerity of your welcome. I shall put on better manners next time."

She disappeared quickly, and Yorke and

Maude looked aghast, each in the other's face for a moment, and then they both laughed heartily.

"How lucky that she did not find us unprepared, Yorke. If we had hesitated in our acceptance of her as a permanent guest, Aunt Agatha would have made a rapid exit. Poor thing, it was very lonely for her at Rokeby—scarcely fit for an old person who needs taking care of."

"It would not do for some households," replied Yorke. "But, thank heaven, this is large enough even for Aunt Agatha's idiosyncracies, and our hearts too, Maude. We both know that she means well, and is fond of us in her peculiar way, so we will both make up our minds to smile at her imperiousness rather than make it a vexatious property. Which we did."

THE END.



